Willing Slaves: The Victorian Novel and the Afterlife of British Slavery

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ABSTRACT

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The commencement of the Victorian period in the 1830s coincided with the abolition of chattel slavery in the British colonies. Consequently, modern readers have tended to focus on how the Victorians identified themselves with slavery's abolition and either denied their past involvement with slavery or imagined that slave past as insurmountably distant. "Willing Slaves: The Victorian Novel and the Afterlife of British Slavery" argues, however, that colonial slavery survived in the Victorian novel in a paradoxical form that I term "willing slavery." A wide range of Victorian novelists grappled with memories of Britain's slave past in ways difficult for modern readers to recognize because their fiction represented slaves as figures whose bondage might seem, counterintuitively, self-willed.

Nineteenth-century Britons produced fictions of "willing slavery" to work through the contradictions inherent to nineteenth-century individualism. As a fictional subject imagined to take pleasure in her own subjection, the willing slave represented a paradoxical figure whose most willful act was to give up her individuality in order to maintain cherished emotional bonds. This figure should strike modern readers as a contradiction in terms, at odds with the violence and dehumanization of chattel slavery. But for many significant Victorian writers, willing slavery was a way of bypassing contradictions still familiar to us today: the Victorian individualist was meant to be atomistic yet sympathetic, possessive yet sheltered from market exchange, a monad most at home within the collective unit of the family. By contrast, writers as diverse as John Stuart Mill, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot located willing slavery in a pre-Victorian history where social life revolved, they imagined, around obligation and familial attachments rather than individual freedom. Rooted in this fictive past, the willing slave had no individual autonomy or self-possession,

but was defined instead by a different set of contradictions: a radical dependency and helpless emotional bondage that could nonetheless appear willing and willful, turning this fictional enslavement itself into an expression of the will. For Dickens, willing slavery provided an image of social interdependency that might heal the ills of the modern world by offering what one *All the Year Round* author described as "a better slavery than loveless freedom." For novelists such as Brontë and Eliot who were no less critical of Victorian individualism, however, fantasies of willing slavery became the very fiction that their work aimed to dissolve.

Chapter One argues that Frances Trollope's groundbreaking antislavery fiction mirrors West Indian slave narratives in describing the slave plantation as coldly mechanical, and then extends this vision to portray early industrial England as an emotionally deprived social world similarly in need of repair. In the second chapter, I argue that Dickens responds to that emotional deprivation, and the replacement of traditional family bonds with what he describes as the "social contract of matrimony," by producing a nostalgic account of willing slavery's dependencies that draws on discourses of slavery found in British case law, where attorneys could exhort the slaveholder to "attach [slaves] to himself by the ties of affection." The last two chapters argue that Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* ironize this earlier nostalgia through female characters who grapple with the archetype of the willing slave. As their characters adopt and then discard the theatrical pose of willing subjection embodied by melodramatic heroines such as Dion Boucicault's "octoroon" Zoe, Brontë and Eliot draw attention to the contradictions inherent to willing slavery, reframing it as a fantasy enjoyed exclusively by white Britons intent on shoring up the familial intimacies that helped preserve their social and economic dominance. These ironic reframings reveal a final paradox: though willing slavery helped create an analogy between African chattel slaves and British family members in fiction, this trope ultimately highlights the differences between the chattel slavery of Africans abroad, where the disruption of kinship bonds was a crucial

method for exploitation and domination, and the imagined household subjection of English characters, rooted in the putatively binding qualities of family feeling.

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Introduction

In 1844, *Fraser's Magazine* published "Reminiscences of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria," detailing the relatively new queen's early years. The piece opens in the summer of 1824 on the princess Victoria at age five, walking along the beach with her mother and "a venerable man, whose name is graven on every human heart that loves its species": William Wilberforce, "the mighty moral combatant of that now crushed giant, Slavery!"[1] While our unnamed author cannot report directly on what Wilberforce told Victoria that day, she speculates, "I think he described to her a young slave girl, torn from her parents, consigned to a slave ship, delivered up to a cruel and inhuman trafficker in flesh, and subjected to the lash, and to misery, tears, and groans, ere her heart should have even known what sorrow and anguish were"; "it may be from that sacred moment," our author concludes, that Victoria "dated her first abhorrence of the principles and practices of slavery."[2] While Victoria frolics in the waves, Wilberforce, our author explains, "followed with parental interest every footstep of the young creature, as she advanced to and then retreated from the coming tide; and it was evident that his mind and his heart were full of the future, whilst they were interested in the present."[3]

The familial scene that *Fraser's* presents to its readers narrates a story about slavery and the Victorian period that has in some ways become absorbed into the way we think about that period, even as we rarely dwell on this relationship as explicitly as the author of these reminiscences. In the *Fraser's* piece, the young Victoria somberly listens as Wilberforce recounts the story of a young slave girl—a girl like Victoria herself—who could only be saved from her horrible fate by a British antislavery movement that was buoyed by the same sentimental pity that the young princess, we are

[1] "Regina's Regina: Or, Reminiscences of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria. By One Who Has a Good Memory," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, January 1844, 1-24, British Periodicals.

[2] Ibid., 2.

[3] Ibid., 2.

assured, must have felt as she listened to Wilberforce. Recounting this scene two decades later, after the abolition of slavery in the British empire in August 1834 and the end of apprenticeship in August 1838, and after Victoria's ascent to the throne just two months earlier, in June 1838, this didactic scene takes on a kind of historiographical significance. The father of the British antislavery movement, Wilberforce also comes to seem like a benevolent father-figure to Victoria herself; as Wilberforce looks on at the young princess and envisions the future of the British empire, with Victoria at its helm, readers are asked to imagine the period of Victoria's reign as a distinct era in British history, one that inherited the freedoms of Wilberforce's antislavery age, but also moved beyond them into a new age freed from "that now crushed giant," the slavery problem. Though Victoria seems enraptured by Wilberforce's tutelage, their moment of contact is brief and fleeting: "the hour soon flitted away," our author reports, and the princess returns home with her mother, while the antislavery hero who remains behind, "joined by some friend, walked quietly on the pier."[4] If the moral battle over slavery and its abolition helped give rise to the Victorian era that followed, one of the greatest triumphs of the British antislavery period was how quickly it allowed the slave past to recede quietly from view to make way for a new era of British freedom. Though modern readers of Victorian fiction do not often direct attention so explicitly to this story, its basic coordinates have come, in some ways, to structure the way we periodize Victorian literature. We often define the start of the Victorian period by the rise of industrialization and urbanization, the early Reform Acts, and the coronation of Queen Victoria herself. If slavery enters into this picture at all, it is as part of the history of turmoil abroad left behind as England redirected her attention towards domestic problems at home in the 1840s.

This project seeks to revise this story. Rather than see the Victorian period as a break with Britain's slavery past, I ask what it might mean to understand this period, instead, as a post-

[4] Ibid., 2.

emancipation period still shaped by slavery's legacies and by the complex ways in which Britons grappled with the meaning that slavery and its abolition might have for their nineteenth-century lives. In this period, slavery did not simply recede from view, but instead was constantly subject to a process of memorialization, erasure, and re-animation in Victorian fiction. These memories have been difficult for readers to notice, however, because they took different forms from the scenes of physical violence, sentimental pity, and British heroism described above. The Victorian novelists at the center of this study—Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot—shared with the *Fraser's* vignette an interest in slavery's relationship to questions of female peril and female power. But in contrast to the vignette's story of individual suffering, "inhuman" exchange, and anonymous cruelty, for Victorian novelists, slavery was also intimately tied to the social scene of family life, where slavery's bondages existed in a complicated relationship to the bonds of obligation and affection around which the family cohered.

Reading slavery in the novel in this way requires us to first move away from the opposition of bondage and freedom that dominates discussions of nineteenth-century slavery. In her 2010 book *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel*, Julia Sun-Joo Lee argues that British novels were linked to African American slave narratives through their use of what she terms the "fugitive slave chronotope."[5] For Lee, this chronotope "is marked by an insistent teleology toward freedom" that "divides biographical and chronological time into pre- and post-emancipatory states."[6] Without denying that these narratives of slavery and freedom circulated widely in nineteenth-century Britain, as they did in America, I argue that in many cases, these teleological stories of liberation were often

[5] Julia Sun-Joo Lee, *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010) 116. In *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), Kari Winter similarly compares nineteenth-century British fiction to American slave narratives, though Winter focuses primarily on their shared gothic stories of female entrapment and escape.

[6] Lee, *The American Slave Narrative*, 19.

decentered in Victorian fiction by competing stories of slavery that sought to circumvent the question of freedom altogether, taking as their central organizing principle a set of lingering attachments to the condition of bondage that persisted across both the biographical time of individual character stories and the historical timeline that putatively separated the "post-emancipation" Victorian period from Britain's earlier "pre-emancipation" epoch. Alongside the binary of slavery and freedom familiar from narratives about slavery of the kind Lee describes, Nancy Bentley has argued that "we can place a second but not quite parallel conceptual axis: not freedom and slavery, but love and slavery." At first glance, love and slavery, like freedom and slavery, seem to be opposites: "to feel the highest love is to abhor the smallest inclination toward the forced subjugation of another." Yet, Bentley continues, in nineteenth-century writing, "ideas of love and slavery fail to remain securely in place as opposing poles."[7] For nineteenth-century British novelists, the enmeshments of love and slavery in fact provided a crucial counterpoint to the teleological stories of individualist freedoms that Lee describes, and that provoked surprisingly ambivalent feelings in many of the period's major authors.

In this project, I argue that Victorian writing was structured by two overarching, and conflictual, frameworks for understanding the relationship between the bonds of love and the bondages of slavery. The first will be familiar to anyone who has read iconic stories of slavery such as Frederick Douglass's narratives. In these texts, the slavery system disrupts kinship bonds, vividly exemplifying Orlando Patterson's influential claim that slavery works in part by replacing the ties that bind slaves to their kin with the depersonalizing bonds between master and slave. In this framework, the slave is a member of the slaveholder family, but a member who is rendered a permanent alien to that household, so that he is simultaneously absorbed within and excluded from

[7] Nancy Bentley, "The Strange Career of Love and Slavery: Chesnutt, Engels, Masoch," *American Literary History* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 460.

the family of the master. As critics such as Edlie Wong have detailed, this framework also allowed slaveholders to co-opt kinship bonds and family feeling shared among slaves as an instrument for social discipline. When slaveholders traveled with slaves to free nations, such as England, or free territories in America, for example, they were able to draw on slaves' emotional ties to enslaved kin left behind in slavery territories to ensure their return to slavery.[8] In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass himself reports that while he was overjoyed to arrive in New York following his escape from slavery, his arrival meant that "I was not only free from slavery, but I was free from home as well."[9] For nineteenth-century British and West Indian writers who depicted British and American slavery plantations in the 1820s and 1830s, slavery's disrupted kinships became emblematic of a form of emotional alienation that was invented and perfected under slavery, but whose influence was pervasive throughout nineteenth-century British culture. For these writers, slavery's legacy was not merely economic, political, or moral, but also affective, as slavery bequeathed to nineteenth-century Britain a deeply alienating culture of industrial capitalism and atomistic individualism that threatened to dissolve traditional forms of family life. If the slavery system made enslavement and freedom equally "homeless" conditions, these writers suggest, its emotional effects might be felt even in a Victorian culture that had ostensibly freed itself from its entanglements with that system.

In the decades that followed the abolition of slavery, however, the emotional deprivations and ruptured kinships that had seemed to be part of slavery's legacy gave way to a second, competing interpretation of the conceptual bond between slavery and the family, in which slavery itself came to seem like an affectionate bond akin to that which structured the Victorian family. Markman Ellis and Carolyn Vellenga Berman have shown how in the eighteenth century, sentimentalist writings offered imagined bonds of love shared between masters and slaves as an

[8] Edlie Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 9-10.

[9] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: New York and Auburn, 1855) 340.

ameliorative answer to the sensational violence of the evil slavemaster and the tearful pity that violence inspired. Ellis writes, for example, that "sentimentalists' re-emphasis of love or virtue in the master-servant relationship raises the question of its similarity to marriage," a similarity that re-appeared in sentimental novels and in texts such as Blackstone's *Commentary on the Laws of England*, in which writers "conceived of slavery and marriage as typologically related: the one discussed or illustrated the other."[10] In *Sentimental Figures of Empire*, Lynn Festa argues, moreover, that sentimental feelings were themselves the product of an imperial culture in which "the loneliness, wonder, fear, and bafflement experienced by travelers and indigenes could veer towards self-dissolution, imperiling the continuity and unity of the self." By contrast, Festa argues, sentimentality represents a unique "rhetorical structure that contains the potentially indiscriminate circulation of feeling," giving a "structure" to the "vagrant affect" of the imperial traveler that "enabled Europeans to preserve the identity of the self in encounters that knitted subject and object together in ways that were difficult to disentangle."[11] To say that slavery represented, in the retrospective view of Victorian novelists, an affectionate, familial bond is thus to say that sentimental constructions of slavery lived on in British culture even after slavery's abolition.

But in contrast to an earlier sentimental culture interested, as Festa argues, in providing a structure for and therefore strengthening the boundaries of the individuated European subject in the midst of disorienting encounters with real colonial subjects and slaves, Victorian writers found in fantasies about affectionate slavery a model for a radical dependency and emotional attachment that could escape the burdens of sentimentalism's bounded individualism. More specifically, Victorian writers returned to the homologies between marriage and slavery Ellis describes in order to

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[10] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 112.

[11] Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006), ProQuest ebrary e-book, 6.

interrogate the limits of a feminine individualism that seemed at odds with both conservative ideals about the family unit and more radical desires for collective forms of social life. As eighteenth and nineteenth-century feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft protested that marriage and British forms of the family made English women into figurative slaves who deserved to be remade into free individuated subjects, a range of writers, from conservative legal thinkers and anthropologists to novelists such as Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, began to imagine a world in which women—enslaved and free alike—would embrace slavery as a paradoxical position in which they might willingly give up individual autonomy in order to preserve cherished social bonds. For these "willing slaves," slavery could seem not only desirable but also strangely willful—turning enslavement itself into an expression of the will.

Thus this project aims to show that slavery often served as a crucial conceptual category for mediating cultural debates about the *limitations* of modern individualism, rather than a vehicle for stories about individual freedom. For early Victorian writers such as Frances Trollope, slavery embodied the perils of a modern world fragmented by capitalism's rapacious estrangement and commodification of human labor, which in turn threatened to estrange and commodify familial bonds, and particularly the bond between mother and child. For writers such as Charles Dickens, a more affectionate form of slavery's attachments promised to heal these modern ills by producing subjects who were radically, but also willfully, dependent upon one other. By later in the period, however, the conflict between these two portrayals of slavery—as both the disruption of kinship bonds and a site for their preservation—led writers such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot to produce novels whose central irony was that its characters drew on a discourse of slavery to describe their conflicted feelings about the very family bonds that the chattel slavery system had so deeply imperiled.

In part, then, this project also sets out to revise our understanding of the relationship

between female individualism and slavery central to many postcolonial readings of Victorian fiction. In "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak has argued that feminist readings of Victorian fiction often center around the reclamation of a heroic female individualist, who might emerge from dehumanizing ideology as a triumphantly singular, productive, and self-possessed liberal human subject. For Spivak, this "feminist individualism" belongs to a broader project of human making and remaking that was carried out in starkly different fashion under the sign of imperialism. Spivak writes, "what is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and 'interpellation' of the subject not only as individual but as 'individualist.' This stake is represented on two registers: childbearing and soul making. The first is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as 'companionate love'; the second is the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social mission."[12] Though these two projects shadow one another, however, it is the "distance" between them that matters—a point Spivak argues by turning to the conclusion of *Jane Eyre* and St. John Rivers's self-sacrifice to the work of Christian conversion in India.[13] Whereas the production of the human subject in relation to both the narrative development of the female "individualist" and the maternal reproduction her ending celebrates is represented as familial, legal, realist, and a product of the (in the case of *Jane Eyre*, heroically female) author's powers of imagination, the work on imperial subjects to violently remake them into a reflection of Western humanity is portrayed as extralegal, allegorical, religious, and unimaginable, a point underscored by the novel's switch to "the *allegorical* language of Christian psychobiography" which "marks the inaccessibility of the imperialist project as

[12] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 244, JStor.

[13] Spivak argues that most critics fail to "notice the distance between sexual reproduction and soul making, both actualized by the unquestioned idiom of imperialist presuppositions evident in the last part of *Jane Eyre*" (249).

such to the nascent 'feminist' scenario."[14] Though the acts of "child bearing," "soul making," and novel production that Spivak portrays as the ends of feminism, imperialism, and Victorian literary culture respectively are joined together as forms of human making, the gap between their productions reveals the work that goes into cordoning off the imperial subject from the realm of the human and human imagination—work which then clears space for the female "individualist" to emerge in part by differentiating herself—her legitimacy, her knowability, and therefore her recognition as moral and agentive human subject—from the "native" or colonized subject who remains illegitimate and unknowable to characters and readers alike. As a result, whereas feminism depends upon clear distinctions between "freedom" and "bondage," "knowledge" and "ignorance," imperialism imagines a world where the "violent deconstruction of these oppositions" not only erases the boundaries between freedom and unfreedom, but also sanctions the transgression of those boundaries in the name of the Kantian categorical imperative and Western morality more broadly. But while the relationship between female individualism and imperial violence Spivak describes was indeed elemental to the Victorian novel, it often emerged within narratives that were deeply ambivalent about underlying liberal political concepts such as individualism, autonomy, and contractualism. As a result, the colonial other does indeed become the illegitimate, inscrutable counterpart to the female individualist in Victorian fiction, but not exclusively in order to legitimize the female individualist. She also, at times, provided a model for a constrictive but nonetheless desirable dependency that could be brought back home to England to resolve a set of contradictions that plagued understandings of individualism, and female individualism in particular.

Spivak's reading of the female individualist draws on the portrait of possessive individualism found in C. B. Macpherson's history of the concept. In *Possessive Individualism*, Macpherson argues that liberal democratic political philosophy centers upon the "possessive individual," a character

[14] Ibid., 249.

who emerges in the political thought of Hobbes and Locke, among others, and whose psychology and social relations are fundamentally shaped by the market society that serves as their underlying precondition. For Macpherson, the philosophy of possessive individualism defines the individual subject by its proprietorship over the self and its possessions and its freedom from forms of social "dependency"; set loose from all forms of obligation, the possessive individualist is instead only attached to other individualists through voluntary contracts.

In response, Nancy Armstrong and Gillian Brown have argued that in the nineteenth century, possessive individualism was "revised" and restrengthened by its contact with modern sexuality and domestic ideology.[15] Nineteenth-century domestic ideology worked to separate out emotional life from politics and economics, and in doing so redefined sensibility, interiority, psychological depth, and sentimentality as both "feminine" and sheltered from political or economic activity. But by bringing the proprietorial object-relations of ownership and household management together with a Protestant ethic of private, individual spiritual and moral cultivation under the sign of this new feminine domesticity, Armstrong and Brown argue, domestic ideology in fact remade the possessive individual of seventeenth-century political thought as a uniquely domestic, and therefore "feminized" subject. Supported by forms of labor reconceived of as "unproductive" and organized around consumption and the fetishization of household goods, this new domestic realm clearly bolstered the very capitalist economic system it disavowed as separate from the home.[16] More importantly, however, domesticity offered possessive individualism forms of moral and emotional support and stability that allowed individualism to take its place as the paradoxical center of modern liberalism. By valorizing the isolated domestic sphere as the center from which moral, spiritual, and

[15] See Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) and Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[16] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese makes this argument in "Placing Women's History in History," *New Left Review*, May-June 1982.

therefore national value radiated, domestic ideology positioned the middle class home against both the kinship politics of an older aristocracy and the disorderly domesticity of newer working-class families that failed to draw suitable boundaries between economic activity, state assistance, and the home. In doing so, Armstrong argues, domestic ideology thus helped establish middle-class cultural hegemony and political power. By organizing that power around a domestic sphere defined by the virtues of privacy, emotional sensitivity, and psychological interiority, domesticity helped reformulate the "possessive individual" not only as a fundamentally feminized self, but also created an ambiguous space of social relation. From one angle, domestic ideology appears to preserve the virtues of mutual responsibility, benevolence, obligation, and dependency as the special provenance of domestic relations. From another, it appears to have crafted an isolationist domestic sphere that jealously guarded the family and the self as privatized units that were not only impervious to larger economic and political communities and the modern state, but also implicitly developed an antagonism to the state by detaching from it, positioning the state as superfluous to middle-class culture.[17] Thus domestic ideology promised to hold together atomism and interpersonal sympathy, family dependency and domestic autonomy, allowing the paradoxical liberalism of Victorian Britain to seem at once anti-collectivist and deeply emotional, sentimental, and sympathetic.[18]

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[17] Lauren Goodlad argues for this dual understanding of the individual's relationship to the state and to older modes of collective social experience in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003).

[18] In her essay "Becoming Citizens: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriage," Katherine Franke details the ways in which marriage was transformed, in the wake of emancipation, into a technology for the regulation, criminalization, and incarceration of African Americans in the United States, and therefore for the extension of slavery's afterlife into the twentieth century. At the same time, Franke argues that marriage also came to be understood as a replacement for a state welfare system, insofar as the family rather than the state became responsible for providing care to African American subjects following abolition. This transfer of responsibility for the welfare of the nation's citizens was, in Franke's account, part of a larger movement to redefine the family as a space of "dependency" in contrast to the "independence" required for participation in the liberal capitalist state: "Marriage laws were used in the latter half of the nineteenth century to delimit the family as a place of dependency that stood opposed to the realm of independence and agency

Into this conceptual nexus enters the figure of the female individual, whose close relationship to these broader paradoxes of Victorian liberalism frequently produced an internally-contradictory subject who could seem both powerfully willful and utterly devoid of agency, sometimes simultaneously. In *The Powers of Distance*, Amanda Anderson describes the contradiction between female power and powerlessness that she finds at the heart of many current feminist accounts of Victorian fiction, arguing that while critics such as Armstrong portray women as largely "unreflective" conduits of Foucauldian disciplinary power, they are also, at times, "selectively" granted "an aggrandized form of agency" that grants particular female subjects the ability to both recognize and manipulate the broader power structures described above.[19] While Anderson is undoubtedly right, it seems that the paradox she diagnoses might more profitably be understood as a logical outcome of Victorian liberalism itself, which was invested in conceiving of autonomy and individualism as at once essentially feminine in their spiritual, psychological, and moral senses and at the same time beyond the reach of female subjects in their economic and political instantiations.

When Victorian writers re-imagine some of their characters as "willing slaves," they seek to resolve domestic individualism's contradictions by imagining a form of social dependency in which any desire for personal autonomy had been stripped away, leaving these characters to enjoy the

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enjoyed by white men in the wage-labor market. As such, the advocates of this particular masculine position had an investment in African American respect for and compliance with marriage laws that operationalized the boundary between dependency and autonomy" (293). While the Victorian novel's treatment of marriage and slavery occurs in a very different historical context, it is notable that the novels I discuss raise similar questions about the family's often ambivalent role as a space of "dependency," and the lack of alternatives to family welfare that exist for the novels' frequently orphaned or displaced characters. Part of my aim in tracing the ways in which novelists depict the "dependencies" of family life, therefore, is to begin to register the ways in which those depictions might anticipate some of the transformations Franke describes, and to consider their shared relationship to the enmeshed histories of marriage law and the emancipation of slaves in the Anglo-American world. See: Katherine Franke, "Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages." *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 11 (1999): 251-309.

[19] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton UP, 2001), 37.

comforts of the home freed from the demands for sovereignty that were often welded to those comforts. But in doing so, these writers nonetheless end up drawing upon and even heightening a similarly paradoxical understanding of the feminized will as most meaningful, and most empowered, at the moment of its seeming disempowerment. Characters (male and female) who embody this form of willing slavery such as *Dombey and Son*'s Walter Gay, *Villette*'s M. Paul Emmanuel, and *The Octoroon*'s Zoe, can seem not only willing but also curiously stubborn in their attachments to others—attachments that lead them, not incidentally, directly back to scenes of slavery, from Walter's travels to Barbados to help pay off his Uncle Sol's debts, to M. Paul's travels to Guadeloupe to manage a relation's slave plantation, to Zoe's willingness to auction herself off as a slave to help the bankrupt slaveholding family who once promised her freedom. Taken together, I argue that the stories of these characters, and others like them, come to embody a "willing slavery plot" that, in contrast to nineteenth-century *bildungsromans* and fugitive slave narratives that trace characters' trajectories from dependence to independence, instead detail characters' movements across webs of dependency from which they never wholly desire to free themselves. But though these characters' plots originate as an attempt to dissolve the contradictions inherent to individualism, by the end of the period, writers such as George Eliot who were no less critical of modern individualism began to suggest that these stories of willing slavery were never as free from those contradictions as they might seem. As *Daniel Deronda*'s Gwendolen Harleth laments that her marriage has made her into a woman who willed her own subjection, Eliot begins to suggest that fantasies of willing slavery could only be the product of a British culture in which the transmission of wealth and whiteness through longstanding family ties are relatively secure. Given that they produced these fictions in light of the stories of slavery's disrupted kinships that also circulated throughout the period, authors who portrayed willing slaves in their fiction more often were left to confront new ironies and paradoxes in their attempt to embrace slavery as an alternative to what one *All the Year Round* author calls

"loveless freedom."[20]

In addition to tracing the development of willing slavery plots in fiction, this project situates those plots within a broader history of British slavery and antislavery in which the slave past remains attached to and acts on the era that followed its abolition. In her reading of legal "freedom suits," Edlie Wong has shown how the British courts developed a paradoxical concept of "voluntary slavery" to entrap slaves in bondage in the nineteenth century. Turning to this legal sphere, I show how the concept of willing slavery became tied to the legal form of the Victorian family through a set of reciprocal legal citations that ensured that slavery's conceptual and juridical forms would continue to influence the character of the English family and its representation in Victorian culture long after slavery's legal abolition. In *The Fugitive's Properties*, Stephen Best argues that the law can serve as a crucial place for observing the way in which slavery's form can continue to act upon the world long after the practice of enslavement has ended. Best explains that he takes "Dewey's view of form in history (of form as a dialectic of continuity and change) as axiomatic—as an axiom key to [the] wider assertion that within the text of the law there is an afterlife of slavery."[21] For Best, the isolation and alienation of a person's "properties" into the intellectual property identified by nineteenth-century law contains within it an epistemological and ontological conceit that yields evidence for "a fundamental historical continuity in the life of the United States in which the idea of personhood is increasingly subject to the domain of property" from slavery onwards.[22] It is on the basis of this conceit and its perceived continuities with post-Civil War theories of legal property that Best concludes that "Slavery is not simply an antebellum institution that the United States has surpassed but a particular historical *form* of an ongoing crisis involving the subjection of personhood

[20] "Fetters," *All the Year Round*, 23 January, 1864.

[21] Stephen Best, *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 13-4.

[22] Ibid., 16.

to property."[23] In British law, I argue, it is in family law that slavery serves as a "form" for a different crisis, one that instead entailed questions about whether to include or exclude the family from legal regulation and the contractualism that Janet Halley has argued organized almost all other legal domains in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Best's framework can help us understand why the law provides a particularly generative site for thinking about the ways in which slavery might live on in institutions, social orders, and cultural forms even after its abolition. In his description of the afterlife of slavery in American law, Best imagines that legal forms can in some sense reanimate an antebellum past through their repetition in the present, granting the law an incantatory power that preserves the past even as it is transformed to fit new circumstances. Significantly, because Best conceives of slavery not just as a historical fact but as a historical form, slavery's afterlife, in Best's description, tips over the line separating mere analogy from causality, setting the conditions and possibilities for ownership, self-possession, and recognition. Slavery's legal afterlife adduces what Best describes as "the agency of form."[24]

Best's formulation of the afterlife of slavery, and his underlying faith in formal repetition as a mode not just of memorialization but revivification or reanimation, is shared by influential theories of slavery's cultural legacy such as Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic*. This formulation and its faith in the "agency" of both form and history has also come under criticism (most notably by Best himself in his recent essay "On Failing to Make the Past Present") for advancing a melancholic attachment to the past that refuses to "rest content with the fact that our orientation toward it remains forever perverse, queer, askew," for too readily assimilating the "true alterity of the past" to our modern present, and perhaps most importantly, for insisting upon this attachment to the past

[23] Ibid., 16.

[24] Ibid., 23-4.

and to slavery's dispossessions as a "proxy for race" upon which to base an antiracist politics.[25] Yet what seems most useful about Best's formulation for an investigation of the *Victorian* afterlife of slavery is precisely its faith in the agency and causality of history and particularly the history of legal forms (a faith that Best treats skeptically in his more recent work). Indeed, from a certain angle, one can hear in Best's description of the law's form echoes of Edmund Burke, who wrote of the social contract that "As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."[26] Burke, of course, offers this view of the law's unimpeachable continuities between the living, the dead, and the as-yet-unborn as an ideal, and an imperiled one at that; in describing the law as a form determined by history that acts on the world, Best is merely indexing a modern jurisprudence that Burke helped bring about. Whether or not we want to take this definition of legal and literary form and of historical causality as our ideal, however, it is impossible to ignore that it held sway within conservative critiques of Victorian liberalism.

For Dickens, Brontë, Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and other Victorians, the persistence of willing slavery's emotional appeal offered evidence that different pasts—primitive, ancient, feudal, and colonial—might continue to act on and act in the present. Figures of willing slavery thus represented not only a fantasy of dependency shared among novelistic characters, but also an interdependency between past and present, one in which the slave past might offer a distinctively countermodern response to the alienated and alienating contours of Victorian modernity. Amanda Claybaugh has argued in her influential account of Anglo-American realism that nineteenth-century novelists "thought of novels not as self-contained aesthetic objects but rather as active interventions into social and political life. They thought of novels as performative, and they took their conception of

[25] Stephen Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present." *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2012): 456, 465.

[26] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 85.

performativity from the writings of social reform."[27] In "Willing Slaves," I explore how the politically "performative" qualities of the realist novel helped forge connections across the transatlantic spaces Claybaugh describes, but also across past, present, and future temporalities, adding a trans-historical dimension of the kind Best describes to the novel's performative form. For Victorian writers, as for Best, the repetitions, citations, and iterations that make up legal precedent and legally performative utterances, such as the marriage contract's "I do," offer one kind of model for how the slave past might continue to work on the present. Performance culture, which similarly relies upon repetition, citation, and iteration to transform actions into acting, offers another. In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach argues that "performances…often carry within them the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions."[28] This is particularly true, he argues, in the case of slavery, whose history of circum-Atlantic exchange have a tendency to re-appear in scenes of "displaced transmission" that re-perform scenes from the past, such as the slave auction, in new but uncannily familiar forms. Taken together, these domains—legal performativity, theatrical performance, and the nineteenth-century novel—can thus be thought of as privileged sites for observing slavery's afterlives.

Consequently, by paying particular attention to the performative qualities of novelistic discourse and the performance scenes staged within the novel's pages, we can uncover new figurations of slavery and its afterlife that tend to slip past unnoticed precisely because of the "displaced" or indirect forms those figurations can take. Traces of slavery's memory can be found in the mechanical movements of laboring bodies, a lock of hair braided into a chain, an ironic refusal of a marriage vow, and even a flush of comfortingly nostalgic feelings shared between two

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[27] Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 36.

[28] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 5.

characters, as characters' gestures, bodies, speech acts, and emotions momentarily revivify scenes of the slave past within the novel's frame. Reading a diverse set of embodied performances, performative discourses, and affective experiences, I argue, allows us to look for signs of slavery outside of explicit metaphors and "metonymic networks" alone.[29] More importantly, it also allows us to better understand the ways in which the slave past could, at crucial moments, seem present to, rather than figuratively distanced from, the world of the realist novel.

To return to the scene on which I opened, I want to conclude by gesturing towards the ways in which the affective, legal, and performance histories of slavery that the Victorian novel contains might begin to transform the family romance of slavery history and Victorian modernity that *Fraser's Magazine* set out to portray. Rather than imagine the slave past as a symbol of patriarchal benevolence capable of ushering in a new period of female agency and moral power, the stories of slavery submerged within Victorian fiction present a very different family romance, in which the Victorian period itself remains bound to memories of slavery that never fully disappear. Alternately estranged kin and closest family, slavery remains above all alive to Victorian fiction, blurring the bounds between the present and a slave past to which it has become willingly, legally, and lovingly attached.

Chapter Overview

The four chapters of "Willing Slaves" taken together offer a chronological narrative about the emergence and subsequent reworkings of willing slavery in Victorian fiction. Chapter 1 explores the conditions that allowed for the emergence of these plots in later fiction. Turning to Frances Trollope's antislavery and industrial fiction, this chapter uncovers the continuities she finds between

[29] Both Lee and Elaine Freedgood argue for reading slavery metonymically rather than metaphorically, arguing that metonyms for slavery, from the "fugitive slave chronotope" to the household object that makes its way to England through the slave trade, allow readers to connect Britain to the geography of slavery without assimilating slavery to the novel as a mere metaphor for the predicaments of English subjects. See: Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

the disrupted kinships of the slavery plantation and the alienations of British industrial culture. In the antislavery novel *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836), Trollope writes that Juno, the novel's slave mother, was forced to bear children "more like a well-regulated machine than a human being, never giving any outward indication whatever of either will, wish, or affections."[30] Chattel slavery's exploitations threaten to strip reproduction of its emotion and to re-conceive of human mothers as automatons. By comparing the slave mother to an industrial machine, Trollope establishes a core assumption that animates many nineteenth-century novels: that the social structures that defined industrial capitalism—mechanical production, estranged labor, atomization, the rise of "free," contractual social relations—might be an extension of a chattel slavery system that reduced humans to alienable, exchangeable commodities. Juxtaposing *Whitlaw* to Trollope's factory novel *Michael Armstrong* (1840), I argue that Trollope sees Victorian industrialism as inheriting from chattel slavery a system of exploitation that ruptures family bonds and spurs mourning for the lost maternal affections that slave mothers embody. While Trollope's fiction punctures sentimental fantasies about loving slavemasters and English industrialists, she also captures the sense of emotional deprivation that would later drive Victorians' fictions of willing slavery.

Chapter 2 argues that nineteenth-century conceptions of willing slavery gained significance in English fiction as a response to the pervasive alienations Trollope's fiction depicts. For British feminists, marital coverture threatened to make the wife a willing slave who had to act as if she consented to her own subjection. But for more conservative Britons, feminist discourses of personal freedom threatened the emotional ties that bound English society. In the first half of the chapter, I show how the fictional figure of the willing slave emerged out of these ideological contests. In legal cases that adjudicated slavery, some jurists recognized the "personal" relationship between slaves

[30] Frances Trollope, *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw; or Scenes on the Mississippi*, *The Social Problem Novels of Frances Trollope* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 129. Hereafter cited in text.

and slaveholders as more important than the individual slave's claim to freedom. In doing so, they answered feminists' complaints about women's voluntary slavery by casting personal bondage as both desirable and socially beneficial. In the second half of the chapter, I argue that Charles Dickens expanded on the legal notion that slaves could will their own subjection in *Dombey and Son*. In the novel, Edith Dombey famously compares herself to a "slave in a market" in order to describe the constraints marriage's "house of bondage" places on autonomous English women.[31] But Dickens undermines Edith's feminist protest by describing the idealized emotional life of Uncle Sol and his nephew Walter Gay as a contrastingly willing slavery. Walter finds that his bonds to Uncle Sol at once fill him with affection, weight him with emotional and financial debts, and finally compel him to take a position working in the West Indies where "a knowledge of black slavery" might be requisite (291). By aligning Walter with colonial slaves but bonding him to a loving uncle, Dickens transforms the slave into a figure for the binding love that Edith's desire for freedom from the family would seem to threaten. While Edith appears to follow the path of the chattel slave turned fugitive freeman, Dickens suggests that her detached freedom might ultimately be less desirable than a willing return to slavery's bondages.

In the final two chapters, I turn to two novels that adopted figures of willing slavery in order to critique the fantasies of powerlessness they embodied. Chapter 3 argues that Charlotte Brontë ironizes willing slavery by depicting it as an outmoded fantasy. In *Villette*, Brontë portrays Paulina and M. Paul as characters who share an excessive emotional dependency upon patriarchal institutions—marriage and blood ties, in the case of Paulina; the Catholic church, in the case of M. Paul. From Lucy Snowe's perspective, Paulina in particular exhibits a dangerous slavishness to the men around her that belongs to a retrograde world of tribal conquest and bridal capture; Paulina finds that she has "become a bond" that binds her husband and father to one another by binding

[31] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 432, 847. Hereafter cited in text.

herself in marriage. But in Lucy's descriptions, Paulina's slavishness can also appear to be a product of her powerful will. In contrast to Lucy, who is radically alienated first from family bonds and then from the marriage plot, Paulina's willing captivity comes to seem a privileged position occupied by white Britons who can comfortably embrace social bondages without giving up their free will. At the same time, Lucy finds herself drawn to a vibrant world of aesthetic captivation, which Brontë ties directly to a racially diverse set of women cast in the novel's paintings and performances. This captivation mirrors Paulina and M. Paul's experiences of willing slavery in that it often overwhelms Lucy's will and leaves her feeling subjugated, though not to other people but rather to aesthetic objects. But over the course of the novel, Lucy's aestheticism also allows her to critically distance herself from metaphors of willing slavery and, in the novel's final pages, to begin to describe the history of the slave trade as she narrates the wreck of the ship that carries M. Paul home from the slave colonies. Brontë thus begins to replace the willing slavery plot with glimpses of a globalized modernity where "that—that—individual—'Lucy Snowe,'" as Brontë describes her in an 1853 letter, might instead find herself at home.[32]

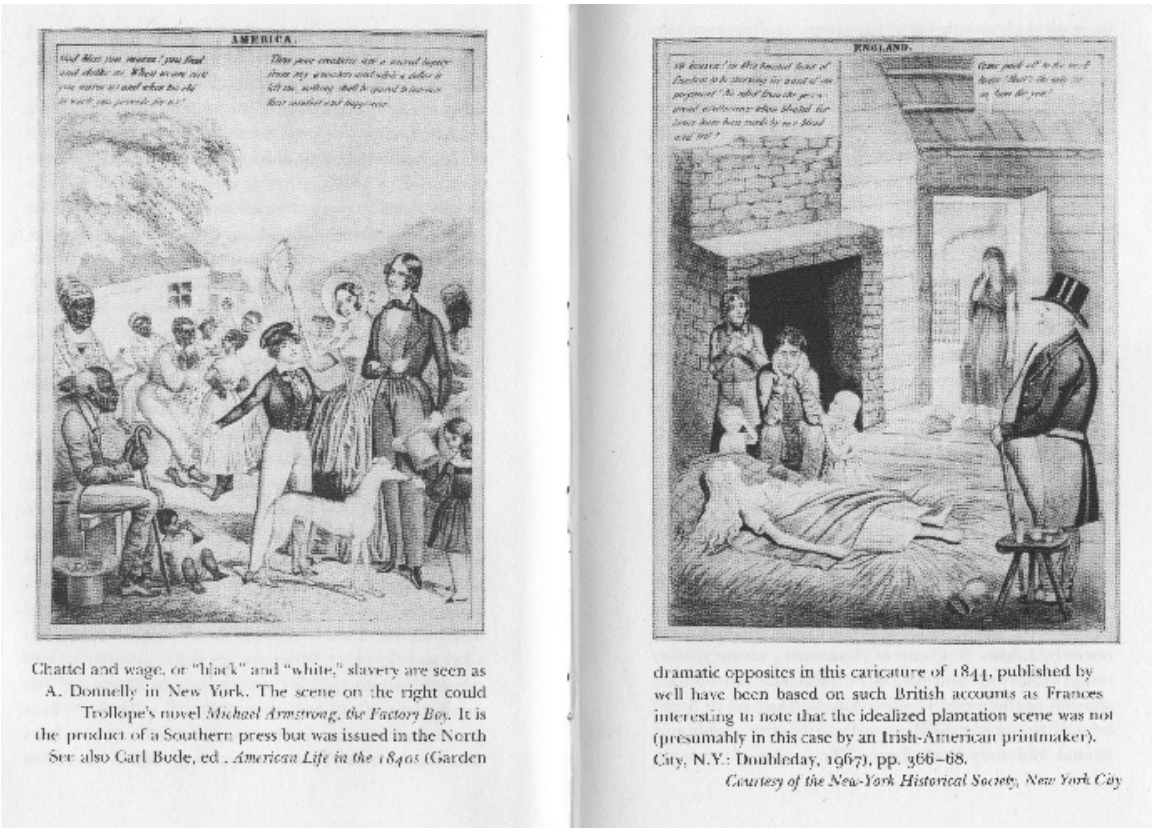
Chapter 4 argues that in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), George Eliot uncovers the acts of appropriation that have gone into making "willing slavery" a conventional metaphor for white, feminine subjectivity in the Victorian novel. In doing so, Eliot seeks to dissolve willing slavery's appeal and shift audiences' attention more decisively towards Atlantic slavery's legacies of racial domination. *Deronda* seems at first to center on a story about an independent English woman, Gwendolen, whose unyielding desire for autonomy leads her to subject herself to "the domain of the husband to whom she felt that she had sold herself."[33] By painting her marriage as enslaving but self-willed, Gwendolen, I argue, casts herself in the role of the willing slave portrayed in stage

[32] Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Haworth, 26 March 1853, *Selected Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 218.

[33] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 669. Hereafter cited in text.

melodramas such as Shirley Brooks's *The Creole, or Love's Fetters* (1847) and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859). In these dramas of possession, marriage and slavery plots frequently cross paths, such that the exchange daughters in marriage and the sale and purchase of slaves become blurred. But in *Deronda*, Gwendolen's story of marital slavery is interrupted by the appearance of Mirah, the novel's Jewish heroine, who appropriates theatrical depictions of slavery in a different way. Where Gwendolen simply reproduces slave melodrama to describe her marriage, Mirah plays with meta-theatrical techniques of racial crossing that were used by African American abolitionists such as William and Ellen Craft and Victorian playwrights such as T. W. Robertson who sought to reclaim depictions of slavery from the minstrel and melodramatic stage. By drawing attention to the different theatrical conventions that frame Gwendolen and Mirah's stories of subjection, Eliot reveals that it is performances of slavery—rather than faithful depictions of the slave past—that had predominated in earlier nineteenth-century novels. But she also suggests that by adopting more self-reflective performance techniques, Mirah, unlike Gwendolen, can draw on those performances to develop a particularist ethnic identity that sustains connections to British, West Indian, and African American histories of slavery and subjection, rather than reducing them to mere metaphor. By the novel's end, Mirah reworks the concept of willing slavery into a willful attachment to the slave past from which a more capacious model of female self-possession might be forged—one that might begin to dissolve the possessive individualism with which so many novelists grappled. Eliot's novel thus suggests that Victorian readers ought neither to deny slavery's history nor cling to fantasies of willing slavery, but instead to embrace new modes of affiliation and disidentification that might emerge from the turmoil Atlantic slavery left in its wake.

Chapter One:
The Mother Machine: Slavery, Maternal Alienation, and Mechanical Reproduction in the Early Nineteenth Century



Edward Williams Clay Illustration, 1841

Source: Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context, 1830-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 48-9.

An 1841 illustration, published in New York by American proslavery propagandist Edward Williams Clay, presents a startling contrast between American slavery and English industry. On the left, a collection of African-American slaves dance in the background of a rural scene in an apparent celebration of the land's fecundity (underscored by a fattened cow standing in the background) and their own bodily health, indicated equally by the "lively" plantation dance in which they participate

and the slave woman who, to the far right of the frame, nurses a white child.[34] On the right, the pastoral play of the plantation scene gives way to a tragic tableau in which the mother of an English working-class family lies dying as her family looks on. The rolling hills of the plantation landscape are juxtaposed to the geometric lines of the working-class home, mirrored by the stark outlines of a factory in the background. While a child tries, fruitlessly, to feed at the breast of his mother, presumably dying of starvation, an obscenely corpulent "captain of industry" looks on, his bodily excess underscored by the caption's imputation of "the purse-proud aristocracy whose bloated fortunes have been made by our blood and toil."

Juxtaposing images of "happy," well-cared for slaves to a scene of industrial misery, Clay's illustration appears to respond to the criticism lodged against American slaveholders by Britons who had only three years before dismantled the slavery system in her own colonies by pointing to English industrialism as a far more exploitive labor system. In doing so, however, Clay invokes a trope that would likewise have been familiar to English audiences from debates surrounding the Reform Act of 1832 and factory labor laws. In the wake of the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834 and the end of apprenticeship in 1838, advocates for the working classes decried the hypocrisy of an English public who supported the reform of slavery abroad while turning their attention away from industrial poverty at home, and at times even argued that the industrial poor were worse off than colonial slaves, who, at least, were not deprived of sustenance, meaningful social relations, and occasions for self-enjoyment, as industrial workers in England were. In his 1844 novel *Mysteries of London*, for example, G. W. M. Reynolds declared,

> Alas! What a wretched mockery it is to hold grand meetings at Exeter Hall, and

[34] In its peculiar conflation of the slave plantation with the country idyll, Clay's illustration serves as a representative example of what Saidiya Hartman calls the "slave pastoral," a mode of representation that draws together a number of motifs loosely associated with the pastoral literary tradition in order to imagine the slave plantation as a space of paternal protection and pleasurable performance. See: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 52-4.

> proclaim, with all due pomp and ceremony, how many savages in the far-off islands of the globe have been converted to Christianity, when here—at home, under our very eyes—even London itself swarms with infidels of a more dangerous character… [The working man] is the publican's slave—the publican's tool and instrument. Negro slavery is nothing to it.[35]

Catherine Gallagher has argued that industrial reformers drew on a discourse of slavery in order to "forge a connection between the problems of industrial society and speculation about the nature of human liberty." While some reformers drew on this discourse to "make common cause with the emancipators" who advocated for slavery's end, however, Gallagher shows that industrial reformers could as easily adopt a distinctively "proslavery rhetoric" that established factory workers and colonial slaves as rivals for the reformist energies of the English populace.[36]

But while some Victorian critics of industrialism endorsed the antipathy between slave plantation and factory captured in Clay's image, for others, these same scenes of plantation and factory could be drawn upon to trace the *continuities* between slavery and industrial capitalism in early nineteenth-century Britain.[37] More specifically, I argue in this chapter that early Victorian novelist Frances Trollope presents readers with scenes of slavery and industrialism quite similar to those found in Clay's illustration, but that she does so in order to investigate specific forms of emotional and embodied experience that the factory system inherits from the West Indian and American slave plantation. Though on their surface the slave plantations found in Trollope's antislavery novels *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836) and *The Barnabys in America* (1843) can resemble the pastoral scene

[35] G. W. M. Reynolds, *Mysteries of London* (Amazon Digital Services, 2011): 48.

[36] Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 31.

[37] Gallagher argues, some "working-class writers made direct attempts to sever…the association between the ideas of emancipation and liberal capitalism," arguing instead that the slaveholders who oppressed colonial subjects abroad and the politicians who oppressed workers in England were "all emanations of the same commercial spirit" (33). In this chapter, I explore the notion that the debilities of slavery and industrialism emanated from a shared source, but I focus largely on the way in which writers such as Trollope imagined industrial capitalism as a product of slavery rather than vice-versa.

Clay depicts, Trollope re-interprets those scenes as evidence of the alienation and mechanization of the human body, and the female body in particular, that the slavery system depends upon. By re-framing the plantation's fecundity as grotesque, and the performances of the enslaved as automatic and alienated, Trollope in effect reverses the pastoral plantation scene to reveal the mechanistic engines of capitalist production, emotional violence, and subjective estrangement that keep such scenes in motion. When she turns her attention to England in her factory novel *Michael Armstrong* (1840), she thus finds signs of slavery's legacy buried everywhere within the similarly mechanical world of industrial production.

Historians have uncovered a wealth of evidence that attests to Atlantic slavery's economic impact on early nineteenth-century England. In his landmark 1944 study, *Capitalism and Slavery*, for example, Eric Williams argues that British abolition represented less a moral cause than an economic one.[38] Abolition, according to Williams, was motivated both by a newfound belief in free trade that rendered the monopolies operating in the West Indies unpopular with industrialists back home and by the growing irrelevance of colonial plantations to a British economy dominated by domestic industry—a development funded by the wealth earned in the mercantile slave trade in the previous century.[39] More recently, Joseph Inikori has defended Williams's thesis, arguing that the structural and technological changes that define the industrial revolution in England were driven by international trade carried out in the circum-Atlantic markets supported by slave labor and by the expanding demand for slave-produced commodities this market helped create.[40] In order to make

[38] By contrast, Christopher Leslie Brown has argued that British abolitionism was a moral cause of a kind, but one intended to build English "moral capital" in order to re-secure English political power in the wake of American independence. See: Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[39] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

[40] Joseph Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 478-481.

this case, Inikori presents two key geographical correctives to earlier studies of slavery and industry (and Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* in particular). First, Inikori expands his consideration of the British slavery economy to include British America alongside the British Caribbean. Second, he stresses that the reciprocity between overseas commerce and industrialization was primarily a regional phenomenon in England. In fact, Inikori argues, "these leading regions were individually more internally integrated and tied more closely to their overseas markets than they were connected to the other regions in England in the early stages of the process [of industrialization]."[41] Reading the history of English industrial capitalism thus requires that we read across national borders and along the periphery of both the English state and the British empire in the early nineteenth century, to trace a network that directly linked English towns to Africa, the British Caribbean, and America.[42]

But while these historical accounts have established an economic legacy that unites British slavery and English industrialism, in Trollope's fiction, we find evidence of slavery's legacy not merely in commodities, capital, or finance structures, but also in a set of family relations and bodily forms that together account for one crucial dimension of slavery's affective legacy in early industrial England. We tend to assume that Victorian novelists, and authors of early social problem fiction in particular, turned to personal romance and familial intimacy as sites that promised protection from the alienation of industrialism and global capitalism. Reading slavery as a system that shaped the intimate lives as well as the economic fortunes of English subjects suggests that even after the emancipation of Britain's slaves in the 1830s, family feelings—and the novels devoted to representing those feelings—were no more free from slavery's history than the economic system that those feelings serve as a bulwark against.

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[41] Ibid., 88.

[42] Catherine Hall has likewise emphasized the close connections between Britain's slave colonies and provincial life in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See: Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

By reading Frances Trollope's antislavery and industrial fiction together, we can thus begin to add nuance to our picture of the relationship not just between slavery and industrialism, but also between the history of British slavery and abolition and the inception of the Victorian period more broadly. Rather than view British emancipation as a fault line separating the Victorian era from the early decades of the nineteenth century that were dominated by debates about slavery and abolition, I instead draw on Trollope's fiction to contend that for some early Victorian writers, chattel slavery could have seemed like a predecessor of the emotional and familial landscape of its industrial present, establishing, in turn, a "genealogical" relationship between slavery and industrial capitalism reflected in the family fictions through which the story of these imbricated histories were imagined and retold by Frances Trollope and others in the Romantic and early Victorian period. The language of parental affiliation will prove particularly apt for characterizing what British writers took to be the relationship between slavery and industrialism for two reasons: First, because British writers, and Frances Trollope in particular, imagined the slave mother and the child factory worker as representative figures for the experience of alienation and emotional estrangement that slavery shared with, and perhaps even bequeathed to, English industrialism. And second, because the specifically literary dimensions of this relationship can be traced to the well-known but little examined fact that the industrial novel, today widely considered one of the key benchmarks in the development of British realism, and the antislavery novel, rarely read or considered within the British realist canon, share a common progenitor in Frances Trollope.[43] Though not the first industrial novel published in England, Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* is often considered the most

[43] Interestingly, Ellen Moers' early account of "women writers" and the development of Victorian fiction stressed precisely this connection. Moers, who argues that the Victorian social problem novel's reformist zeal ought to be read as an expression of a particularly female literary sensibility and sympathetic capacity, writes that "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* achieved the greatest sales and the greatest social influence of any novel of the epic age; but it set a standard for women writers because it had the greatest subject: slavery" (37), arguing that the slavery novel serves as the signal achievement of Anglo-American "epic" writing by women in the nineteenth century, a category that includes British industrial novels for Moers. See: Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women's Press, 1980).

influential early example, responsible for introducing many of the genre's key features (depictions of factory work, appeals to the pastoral responsibility of "captains of industry," and a marked ambivalence towards labor as a political class).[44] Likewise, Trollope's *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836) has in recent years gained recognition as the first antislavery novel published in the Anglo-American market, preceding the publication of Richard Hildreth's *Archy Moore* later in the same year and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852.[45] A minor author herself in the canon of British realist fiction, Trollope is perhaps better known today as the producer of the period's most industrious novelists, Anthony Trollope. As such, it risks cliché to reduce Trollope to the role of mother-author. But as I will show, one of the defining features of Frances Trollope's fiction is the way in which she makes motherhood an organizing metaphor for slavery, industrial capitalism, and novel writing alike, in the process suggesting that these three modes of production are connected to one another.[46] More specifically, I will argue that Trollope's fictional investigations into the slave plantation and the factory floor produce not only a significant re-imagining of the historical relationship between these two phenomena, but also a distinctive literary style, that of the "mother machine," whose strange combination of heightened emotionalism and affective estrangement are equally embodied by the slave mother, the industrial machine, and Trollope-as-author herself.

In the first section of this chapter, I will briefly survey representations of slavery and industrial poverty in British writing from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in order to

[44] Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood* (1839-40) came out at the same time, and both were preceded by novels, such as Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837) and Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* (1839) that surely share partial credit for the realist novel's turn to abjection, criminalization and incarceration of the English poor that undergird industrial novelist's ambivalent attempts to recuperate the character of the working-class protagonist.

[45] Brenda Ayres, "General Introduction to *The Social Problem Novels of Frances Trollope* Series," *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), x.

[46] For a reading of the importance of mother figures in Frances Trollope's work, see: Mary Wilson Carpenter, "Figuring Age and Race: Frances Trollope's Matronalia." *Frances Trollope and the Novel of Social Change*, ed. Brenda Ayres (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 103-118.

show the surprisingly central role that the figure of the slave mother played in depictions of British slavery in this period and particularly to depictions of England's relationship to the slave plantation. In Clay's illustration, the slave mother's body synechdocally represents both the nutritive agricultural space of the plantation she inhabits and the suffusion of parental warmth that putatively bonded her to her slavemasters. In the more critical depictions of the plantation produced in the British West Indies and in England in this period, the slave mother's body proved a similarly crucial site for both figuring slavery's cruelty and contesting the paternalistic mythos of colonial slaveholding. But while British writers reframed slave maternity in these texts, they also upheld a fundamental affiliation between slavery and maternity, one that would prove particularly meaningful as they sought to account for the loss of familial care and sense of emotional deprivation they found when they turned to the English working classes. In the second section, I then turn to Frances Trollope's fiction, to argue that Trollope reimagines the slave mother not as a figure of emotional care but of emotional estrangement, transformed by the interworkings of slavery and capitalism into a "mother machine" who embodies the cruelty of slavery and industrial modes of production alike. I conclude by arguing, however, that Trollope at times also embraced the mother machine as the engine for both a distinctive form of resistance to alienation and for Trollope's distinctively slippery style of reformist realism.

Slave-bearing Bodies and Treadmill Machines

In the late eighteenth century, British writers in both England and the West Indies turned to the slave mother as a figure whose violent marginalization from the field of human subjectivity might account not only for the cruelties of chattel slavery, but also for the emotional deprivations of British labor more broadly during the rise of industrialization. In this section, I will explore a range of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts from both Britain and the West Indies that explore this maternal figure in different forms. In her exploitation and estrangement from her

children, the slave mother who appears in these texts draws together a surprising constellation of themes that I argue shape the terms of the debate around the relationship between slavery and industrialism, particularly in Frances Trollope's fiction. In these texts, maternal care and its estrangement provides an occasion for both the mechanization and theatricalization of the human subject, embodied conditions that are found on the slave plantation and the factory floor alike.

In *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, William Blake establishes an indirect affiliation between slave mothers and abandoned working-class children in order to illustrate how the paternalistic structures of domination that are the object of his critique disrupt the emotional worlds of the slave family and the working-class family in similar ways. Dwelling on the promises of a Christian pastorship that supposedly offers protection and comfort to the poems' child speakers, the series' opening poems, "Introduction" and "The Lamb" conjure a rural landscape seemingly outside of time and space, marked by classic pastoral motifs: lambs and shepherds, song and dance, green pastures and pastors who proffer spiritual care. In "The Lamb," a child recounts to a lamb the story of Christian incarnation—a story, in the child's telling, that is about Christ becoming a lamb-like child, a story that both alludes to and elides the sacrificial violence of Christian incarnation, stressing instead the material comforts (feed, clothing, and tender voice) that pastorship provides. More importantly, the poem sets up the slippery play of identification and misidentification, as the logic of "The Lamb" rests upon the ease with which both names and descriptors can move between Christ, child, and lamb in the speaker's account, so that all three ultimately share the name "lamb" by the poem's conclusion ("He is callèd by thy name/For he calls himself a Lamb…We are callèd by his name").[47] This play of identification and misidentification goes on to structure several of the poems that follow, in which slaves and urban chimney sweeps come to resemble the lamb-child. But where

[47] William Blake, "The Lamb," *Songs of Innocence and Experience. The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D: The Romantic Period*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), lines 13-4. Line numbers from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* hereafter cited in text.

this opening seems to open on a world that offers universal, pastoral care, the poems that follow depict a world where a degraded form of Christian paternalism only serves to abet the emotional abandonment of the later poems' child speakers.

In the more topical poems that follow, Blake places this promise of paternal benevolence in tension with a more complex form of maternal love, embodied by the slave mother. In "The Little Black Boy," Blake stresses the ways in which British, Christian "universalisms" create a rupture between the poem's child speaker, a young slave who lives in a British colony, and his mother, also a slave. In the poem, the sacrificial logic of Christian incarnation re-emerges within the narrative of a young boy whose mother seeks to comfort him with a story of divine protection—one in which recognition on the part of a white English boy is confused with spiritual transcendence. The force of the poem comes, however, less from the ways in which an antiblack colonialist ideology warps the boy's self-conception, than from the way that both English and divine forms of "love" interrupt the story of maternal care upon which the poem opens: "My mother bore me in the southern wild / And I am black, but O! my soul is white; / White as an angel is the English child: / But I am black as if bereav'd of light" (1-4). The boy's description of his mother plays on the verb "to bear," a verb that melds sacrificial pain and creative generativity within the maternal body. The poem's first line, "My mother bore me in the southern wild" (1) opens upon these dual meanings, as Blake's use of the word "bore" stresses at once the mother's life-giving act and the suffering she bears on his behalf. The poem thus emphasizes the ways in which care and pain become intertwined in the figure of the slave mother, rendering that maternal love as one that seems at once intolerable and at the same time free from the degraded feelings that characterize the "love" that Blake ascribes to the English boy and to God, respectively.

The intertwining of pain and affection that characterizes maternal care is then reproduced in the physical body of the boy. In Blake's description, the boy's dark skin appears, simultaneously, to

be a wound created by the heat of the sun—"these black bodies and this sun-burnt face" and as a respite from that pain for others, "a shady grove" (15-6). While the boy and his mother are, presumably, laborers, the "work" that they do in the poem is the work of "bearing" ("when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear") that falls upon the black body alone in this poem. Thus the dynamics of violence and care that characterized the Christian pastorship that Blake imagines in "The Lamb" are re-located to the space of the body in "The Little Black Boy," first the maternal body, and then the even more localized epidermal space of "blackness" itself. Blake's poem, then, performs a reading of the black subject as one that is "hyperembodied," circumscribed by the body's pained status.[48] Blake also complicates the status of the body, and the black body in particular, however, through his use of the word "bore," which makes pain (and maternal pain in particular) generative as much as a form of wounding. Indeed, the poem can be read as aligning the boy's mother not only with Christian sacrifice but also with the poet-speaker of the "Introduction" whose ink "stain'd the water clear" (18), suggesting that the interplay of black and white characteristic of poetic production might be linked to the racial schema of black and white bodies in "The Little Black Boy." Within this framework, the mother's body can be at once pained, reproductive, and poetically productive.[49] If "The Little Black Boy" begins as a reflection on natality, however, it

[48] For a discussion of the "hyperembodiment" of the pained subject, see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19, who discusses the "hyperembodiness of the powerless," and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 199, 207. Scarry argues, for example, that "to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and…is almost the condition of those without power (207).

[49] Indeed, accounts of "The Little Black Boy" seem to tend to critique precisely this narrow focus upon the black body and blackness itself in the poem, particularly given Blake's participation in the illustrations for Steadman's *Narrative*, which, in Marcus Wood's account, infamously depict the suffering black body as an object of spectacularized and at times eroticized suffering. In my reading, I do not want to refute these claims, but rather to demonstrate how Blake, in this particular instance, might complicate his own account of the hyperembodied status of the black subject by offering a glimpse of the maternal and creative generativity with which that hyperembodied state becomes aligned in the poem. It is also worth noting that, according to Saree Makdisi, in the illustrations for the poem, Blake would sometimes change the skin tone of the speaker, further destabilizing the

concludes on a note of rupture, as British ideals intrude upon the scene of recognition between the boy and his mother that the poem opens upon. In the poem's closing lines, the little boy transfers his mother's affections to a paternalist vision of white, British hegemony: "Thus did my mother say, / and kissed me; / And thus I say to the little English boy / When I from black and he from white cloud free…I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear / To lean in joy upon our father's knee" (21-26).[50]

The displacement of maternal affection with which Blake's poem closes is illuminated by a set of influential accounts of the dismantling of kinship bonds and alienation of familial feeling in the chattel slavery system in the Americas. In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson defines the "social death" that characterizes slavery as a form of "natal alienation," an uprooting that replaces the kinship bonds of the enslaved with the "fictive kin bonds to the master and his family."[51] This violent uprooting is, for Patterson, followed by a second, "interior" natal alienation that introduces the slave into the master's community, but does so by introducing him as "a non-being" or "an unborn being" who experiences depersonalization, a form of death, even as he lives.[52] In the closing lines of "Little Black Boy," we could say that Blake highlights the structures of natal alienation that replace the bond between mother and child with relations of domination that refuse to accord recognition to the enslaved.

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fixity of the speaker's hyperembodied racialization in the poem. (Indeed, Makdisi argues we ought to read the plates for *Songs* as "a wide virtual network of traces" rather than as stable entities). See Makdisi, "The Political Aesthetic of Blake's Images," *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113-4.

[50] Notably, these lines might also imply that the "little black boy" and the English boy also literally share a father in the largely absent figure of the slaveowner, gesturing towards the quotidian fact of the coerced intimacy between slave and slaveowner that likewise gets occluded by a colonialist discourse that opposes freedom and racial purity to black slavery.

[51] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 54.

[52] Ibid., 38.

But more recent accounts of slavery kinship have highlighted the ways in which maternity was not just disrupted under New World slavery, but was also transformed into a crucial mode of production. In her essay "The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative," Nancy Bentley defines "kinlessness" as the condition inherited by slaves who, in the process of being born to an enslaved mother, are at the same time denied kinship bonds. This process, Bentley argues, not only signifies the "social death" that Orlando Patterson has argued attaches to the natally alienated slave, but also the claims that the slavery economy makes on the reproductive functions of the enslaved for the continued production of labor and the perpetual reproduction of the social conditions of slavery:

> By appropriating a woman's 'future increase,' the law relies on the facts of birth and descent even as it refuses to accord any bonds of belonging to that birth. Kinlessness is thus a condition that regimes of power have imposed in order to isolate and extract the sheer materiality of a human population—their bodies, labor, and reproductive capacities—from the sphere of the familial…Kinlessness thus isolates the reproductivity of slavery (enslaved women, Douglass reminds us, 'had *many children*') as the site for extracting biopolitical matter, the denuded human 'increase' that defines and perpetuates a class of infrahuman beings.[53]

By reading the biological reproduction of enslaved bodies as a mode of economic and social production, Bentley begins to show how we might interpret the labor of the slave mother in light of Marxist theories of alienation. In the account of industrial alienation that Marx offers in "Estranged Labor," he argues that, in producing the commodity, "the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, and the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes….the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien."[54] The estrangement of the object of production from the worker who produced it is mirrored, however, in the worker's self-estrangement, which arises

[53] Nancy Bentley, "The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 271.

[54] Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor," *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 2009), 108.

from the extraction of labor as a commodity from the body of the laborer itself. As Ann Cvetkovich explains, for Marx, this process of estrangement is largely abstract or immaterial; when he depicts the extraction of labor as a physically destructive practice that causes corporeal pain to the worker, Marx effectively "sensationalizes" the process of commodification, transforming that abstract process, mediated by the commodity object, into a more immediate process of the extraction or destruction of the worker's flesh.[55] By contrast, Elaine Scarry has argued that the process of alienation that Marx describes disrupts a largely corporeal practice of human making that encompasses not only the production of material objects that seem imbued with the worker's sentience, but also the production of sentient humans themselves. For Scarry, in other words, the process of human making that Marx describes parallels the act of making humans recorded in *Genesis*, underscoring the inextricability of the body from the acts of making and unmaking that Marx describes.[56] The central conflict that Ann Cvetkovich highlights in her critique of Scarry turns upon the extent to which labor, and thus its alienation, is in fact materialized or abstracted in Marx's account of the production of the commodity. Ultimately, Cvetkovich argues, the commodity form that Marx describes derives its force from its ability to appear, at some moments, immaterial and so invisible and, at others, materially rooted in the corpus of the working classes.[57]

This question returns with renewed force, however, when the commodity in question is a human body. As Saidiya Hartman, Stephen Best, and others explain in their analyses of the slave system in nineteenth-century America, slavery represents not only the commodification of particular bodies, but also the amplification of the logic of commodity itself, by collapsing any distance between the commodity form and the laboring body within the commodified corpus of the

[55] Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992), 179.

[56] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 242-277.

[57] Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings*, 187-191.

enslaved. "The commodity," Best writes, "celebrates becoming human in the slave."[58] Under slavery, in other words, not just the labor power of the enslaved but the body of the slave itself becomes a commodity, collapsing the distinctions between commodity object and human body that Marx maintains, threatening, in the process, to likewise transform the living human into a merely sentient object—one whose sentience speaks the truth of the slave master rather than the enslaved. Hartman explains,

> The relation between pleasure and the possession of slave property, in both the figurative and literal senses, can be explained in part by the fungibility of the slave—that is, the joy made possibly by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity—and by the extensive capacities of property—that is, the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons. Put differently, the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion.[59]

In Hartman's description, the body's capacity as a figurative surrogate for another—the structure delineated by Marx's account of estranged labor—transforms, under slavery, additionally, into the literal surrogation that the body of the slave is made to perform as a site both of enjoyment and of the articulation of the slave master's "truth." Slavery, in other words, not only reduces the slave to the commodified body but also intensifies and materializes the relationship between commodification and bodily subjection that, in Marx's framework, is more ambivalent because it is mediated by a distinct commodity object. By collapsing the remaining distance between the body of the laborer and the commodity object, however, the slave system also amplifies capitalism's alienating effects, producing a body that, radically estranged from its subject, is appropriated or permeated by the will of the slave master. For Hartman, as for Best, slavery thus transforms the

[58] Best, *The Fugitive's Properties*, 2.

[59] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

slave body into something akin to a stage performer, whose gestures and expressions serve to express not the inner life of the enslaved but the alien "feelings, ideas, desire, and values" of the powerful, both figuratively (as when slave-owners deliberately misread the expressions of the enslaved) and literally (as when slaves, "hair dyed, faces greased, preening, primping, smiling, dancing tumbling," are forced to take part in the spectacle of their domination and commodification.[60]

Taken together, these theories provide a framework for reading the labor of biological reproduction under slavery as one example of how chattel slavery systems intensified, literalized, and materialized the often more abstract or mediated forms alienation takes in Marxist theory. At the same time, they allow us to see how this extreme form of alienation works to transform slaveholders' perceptions of both the slave mother and the enslaved subject she produces into mechanized figures, as biological reproduction becomes a mechanism for commodity production, while the humanity of the subjects produced becomes an estranged, theatricalized screen upon which the will and perceptions of slaveholders can be projected.

In "The Chimney Sweeper," Blake begins to draw these different interpretations of slavery's alienations together in his depiction of a chimney sweeper who theatrically embodies the slave boy. If in "Little Black Boy" Blake dramatizes a process of parental, emotional estrangement under slavery, in "The Chimney Sweeper," he begins to connect that process more directly to both the

[60] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 39. Stephen Best's *The Fugitive's Properties* provides perhaps the most helpful formulation of the uncanny resemblance between the structures of slavery on the one hand and the instabilities of ephemeral performances on the other, in his account of the linkages between slavery and intellectual property law in nineteenth-century America. There, Best argues that the development of technologies like the camera and the phonograph, capable of mechanically reproducing aspects of human performance like voice or facial expression (as well as ideas and visual images), led parties to seek to "secure property rights in heretofore inalienable aspects of their personhood"—aspects whose reconception as alienable was enabled by slavery's legal codification and its ghostly afterlife in the letter of the law: "The issues of personhood and property that slavery elaborates and the issues emanating from the emerging law on intellectual property are part of a fundamental historical continuity in the life of the United States in which the idea of personhood is increasingly subject to the domain of property" (16).

theatricalization of the enslaved subject, who then gets conflated with the English working classes:

> A little black thing among the snow
> Crying " 'weep, 'weep, 'weep," in notes of woe!…
>
> "Because I was happy upon the heath,
> And smil'd among the winter's snow;
> They clothed me in the clothes of death,
> And taught me to sing the notes of woe.
>
> "And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
> They think they have done me no injury (1-10)

As the poem's opening conflates the boy's labor—chimney sweeping—with his melancholy "weeping," Blake likewise collapses the specter of "the little black boy" onto the urban worker, conjuring, in the process, the image of the busking street minstrel, "blackened" and singing a ballad of woe. On the one hand, then, Blake conjures the same hypermaterial, black body that he described in "The Little Black Boy," rendering "blackness" a material substance synonymous with "woe" and capable of traveling from the slave colony to the city, where it has transmuted from skin color to a skin-covering ash. In this way, Blake draws upon the very "replaceability and interchangeability" of the fungible black body that underwrites the subjection of the enslaved, reducing the humanity of the slave boy to a pained sentience that is then appropriated by the working-class sweep and sidewalk minstrel. At the same time, we could read this poem as another instance of Blake's dedication to questioning that same logic of interchangeability throughout the poem sequence, as Blake reveals how acts of misrecognition in both "The Lamb" and "The Little Black Boy" elide the sacrificial violence that underwrites both the traditional and modern scene of pastoral care. Indeed, in this poem, it is his parent's tendency to misread his dancing body as a symptom of joy rather than psychic injury that constitutes the chimney sweep's particular pathos. Blake thus asks us to read beyond the figure of the happy minstrel that the boy impersonates here to see how the sweep and the "little black boy" share an experience of natal alienation that renders them equally dependent upon the failed pastorship of the English state and the British Church. If "The Little Black Boy"

places the slave mother and the English child in an oppositional relation to one another, "The Chimney Sweeper" ultimately complicates that relationship, by suggesting that the English working-class child and the colonial slave are equally alienated from a *maternal* care that the slave mother alone, in the poem sequence, is available to offer.

While Blake's poems thus both critique certain dynamics of the slavery system and appropriate them for poetic effect, his sequence is most relevant for the way in which it reveals how the slave plantation and urban-industrial England could be imaginatively linked to one another by questions of affection, estrangement, and care that, for Blake, were urgently connected to parental, and particularly maternal, feeling. Slavery transforms the natally alienated slave boy into a theatricalized figure available for appropriation, mirroring the ways maternal reproduction under slavery makes the black child and blackness itself commodified and fungible. But in doing so, Blake makes visible the pain this process yields for slave and English worker alike. At the same time, he also imagines a way in which maternal reproduction might be tied, alternatively, to his own act of poetic production, placing the slave mother at the center of his vision of the interconnections between social life on the slave plantation and in urban-industrial England.

If Blake emphasized slavery's emotional estrangements and the theatrical subjects those estrangements could produce, nineteenth-century West Indian slave narratives emphasized the ways in which slavery's estrangements could produce a mechanized body that tied the slave to the English worker more directly. In the 1830s, James Williams and Ashton Warner published accounts detailing their lives as slaves in the British empire. Unlike the American fugitive slave narratives to come, Williams's and Warner's accounts tend to focus not on the story of how they secured their freedom, but rather on their work as laborers and prisoners in the British Caribbean, where their status as slaves was clouded by their circuitous movements in and out of various states of apprenticeship,

imprisonment, and manumission.[61] More importantly for this chapter, their narratives also re-write the "joyous" scene of slaves' agricultural production and maternal care depicted in Clay's illustration as a scene of mechanical production and bodily degradation more closely aligned with factory labor.

In Ashton Warner's 1831 *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro; Being the Narrative of Ashton Warner, a Native of St. Vincent's*, Warner offers a description of the field that is, in many ways, noticeably similar to the descriptions of factory labor that will be produced in the following decade. Assigned to a field gang, Warner describes the strict regimentation and body-destroying labor of the sugar plantation:

> They were obliged to be in the field before five o'clock in the morning; and, as the negro houses were at the distance of from three to four miles from the cane pieces, they were generally obliged to rise as early as four o'clock, to be at their work in time. The driver is first in the field, and calls the slaves together by cracking the whip or blowing the conch shell. Before five o'clock the overseer calls over the roll; and if any of the slaves are so unfortunate as to be late, even by a few minutes, which, owing to the distance, is often the case, the driver flogs them as they come in, with the cart-whip or with a scourge of tamarind rods. …
>
> In the cultivation of the canes the slaves work in a row. Each person has a hoe, and the women are expected to do as much as the men. This work is so hard that any slave, newly put to it, in the course of a month becomes so weak that often he is totally unfit for labour.
>
> …
>
> They work from five o'clock to nine, when they are allowed to sit down for half an hour in the field, and take such food as they have been able to prepare over night.

[61] I am indebted to Nicole N. Aljoe's essay, "'Going to Law': Legal Discourse and Testimony in Early West Indian Slave Narratives" (*Early American Literature* 46: 2 (November 2011): 351-81) for drawing my attention to both Williams and Warner's narratives. Aljoe offers an account of these narratives as a set that together reflect a common set of concerns (specifically around legal testimony and the function of the courts in the British colonies) that are specific to the British West Indian slave narrative. Aljoe notes that these narratives were dictated to and transcribed by amanuenses which, she explains, while it undermines their status as unmediated accounts of slave life, does not disqualify their significance for an analysis of the rhetoric of slavery in nineteenth-century Britain prior to 1838. Aljoe likewise notes that these narratives were submitted to Parliament as evidence of the abuses of slave-owners and colonists in the British West Indies during debates on the future of the slave colonies.

But many have no food ready, and so fast till mid-day.[62]

Warner's description ought to sound familiar, in many ways, from Victorian accounts of the factory: the plantation, like the factory, in Warner's account, is marked by strictly-regimented work hours that override distinctions between day and night; cruel overseers who rely upon violence to maintain the inhuman order of the field; the reduplication of bodies at work whose homogeneity likewise overrides individual particularity; and the omnipresence of starvation that contrasts starkly with the productive labor in which those laboring bodies are engaged—a production that, as Warner notes, prevents apprentices from cultivating their own food.[63] Warner's description of the cane field alerts us to how intimately connected descriptions of mass-production in the West Indian slave colonies may have been to early depictions of the factory floor. Indeed, when Warner (who was manumitted as an infant but pressed into slavery again at age ten) decides to reclaim his legal right to freedom, he does so in the language not of sentiment or dignity (as later slave narratives will), but rather in the language of the labor strike: "I went back to the estate; but determined that I would no longer be treated as a slave, nor work like a slave. I refused to turn out early in the morning; but went down to

[62] Ashton Warner, *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro: Being the Narrative of Ashton Warner, a Native of St. Vincent's. With an Appendix Containing the Testimony of Four Christian Ministers, Recently Returned from the Colonies, on the System of Slavery as It Now Exists* (London, 1831), Documenting the American South (University of North Carolina, 2001), Web, 33-4. Hereafter cited in text.

[63] Warner later explains that slaves were required to grow their own food—a task that was nearly impossible given that their only time to work their "provision grounds" was on Sundays. Strikingly, Warner notes that even raising livestock was considered more of a provision for death rather than a form of sustenance: "Those that can save a little money, buy a pig and fatten it, that, in the case of any death happening among their friends, they may sell the pig to provide a few necessaries for the funeral" (41).

Catherine Gallagher has argued, conversely, that industrial reformers could easily imagine that the factory floor resembled the slave plantation: factory hands "were physically confined and had to work long hours according to the rhythms of the spinning machines; alertness and diligence were too often maintained by corporal punishment, and the sheer size of many textile mills, with their accompanying impersonality, reminded reformers of vast plantations worked by indistinguishable slaves" (11).

the works at nine, and helped the slaves in what they were doing, just as it pleased myself; for, as I was not paid, I did not think that I had any right to work" (50).

These similarities are reinforced in the testimony of Reverend Joseph Orton, included in the appendix to Warner's account. There, Orton writes,

> The excessive labour extorted from the slave is certainly one of the worst features of this cruel system. The toil of the slave was not so excessive for its violent exertion, *as in point of constancy and rapidity of motion*.…These slaves were placed in a line in the field, with drivers at equal distances, and were obliged to maintain that line throughout the day, so that those who were not quite so strong as the others were literally flogged up by the drivers; and this *in a rapid and constant motion* was its characteristic. (73-4; emphasis mine).

Stressing the "constancy and rapidity" of slaves' motions, as well as their geometric configurations, Orton amplifies the mechanization and spatio-temporal regimentation of the plantation.[64] While Warner draws upon the notion of the labor strike to claim a partial freedom, however, the authenticating documents appended to his text read in his descriptions of slaves' unwilled work the image of the automaton—a human transformed into a machine. In her introduction to Warner's narrative, Susannah Strickland explains that, "Animated by no hope, and bound to his employer by no ties of reciprocal interest, he [the slave] drags on from day to day his brutalised existence, and looks forward to death as the only termination of his woes. *He sinks into a living machines whose actions are guided and enforced by the will of another,* and his works and looks correspond with his mental and bodily abasement" (13-4; emphasis mine). Strickland's account, in other words, imagines that the slave's estranged labor "guided and enforced by the will of another" aligns him not only with the machine-worker but also with machinery itself, transforming his body into a "living machine."

Where Warner's account and the editorial apparatus that surrounded it allows readers to see how plantation labor risked turning the enslaved body into a kind of "living machine," James

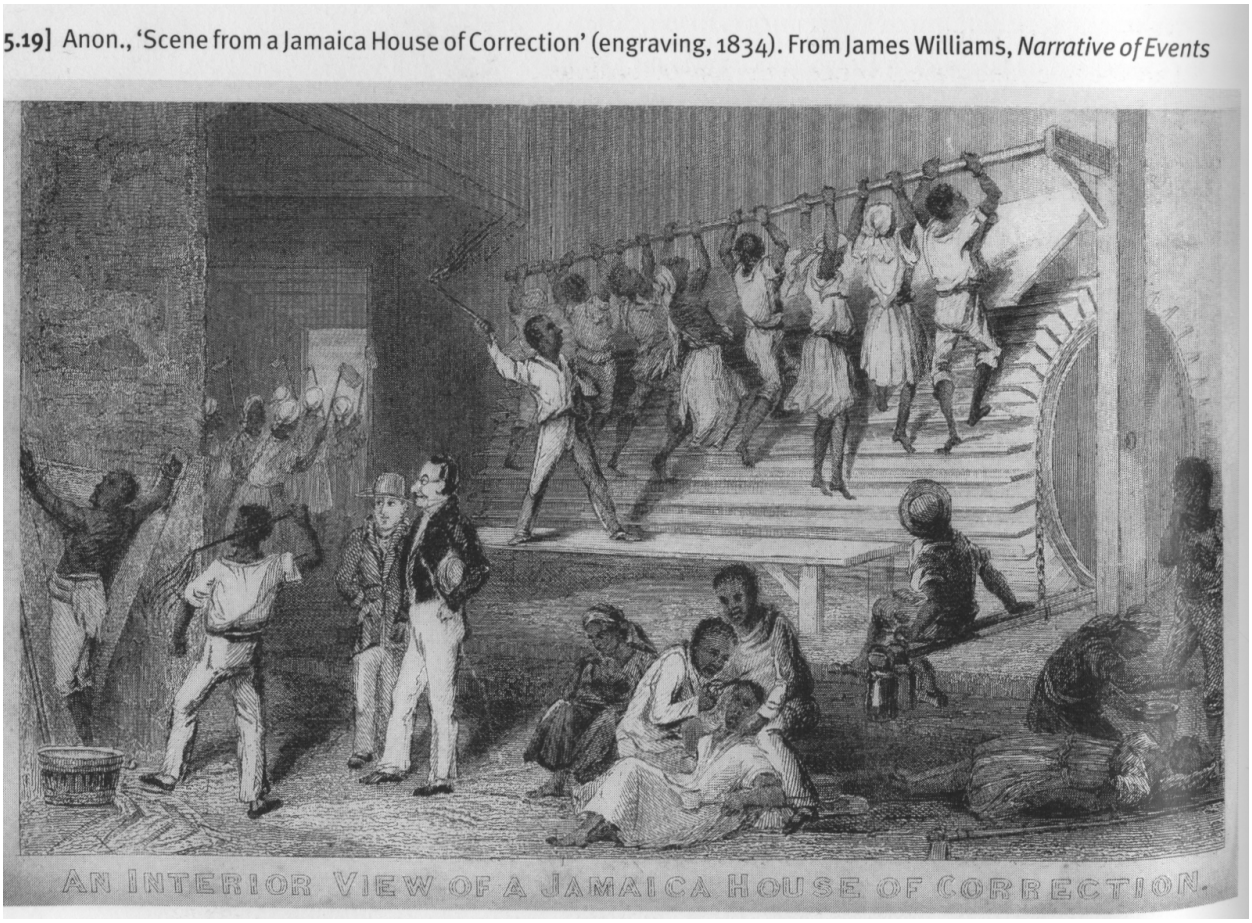
[64] As Warner notes, his descriptions ought to give lie to the myth of the consenting pastoral subjects of slavery that he imagines to be prevalent in England at the time. Slaves, Warner explains, are "insulted, tormented, and indecently exposed and degraded; yet English people wonder that they are not contented" (43).

Williams's narrative extends this image even further, to reveal how slavery's violence transformed human mechanization from a byproduct of a labor system into a painful, performative spectacle. In *A Narrative of the Events since the First of August 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica*, published in London in 1837, Williams follows Warner in depicting the slave plantation as a space in which labor and punishment often become indistinguishable. Perhaps most emblematic of this imbrication is the "treadmill," a penal device that won its notoriety largely from William's detailed descriptions in *A Narrative.* The treadmill, a method of punishment originally devised for English prisons, consisted of a large wooden wheel covered in slats. Prisoners' hand were tied to a bar above the treadmill; as they hung from the bar, they were forced to "dance the treadmill," turning the wheel by stepping on its slats. Though the wheel is clearly designed to evoke an engine of mechanical production, its turning produced nothing. As Marcus Wood explains in *Blind Memory*, the treadmill, "constituted a perfect example of what Primo Levi has termed *useless violence*, in that the energy extorted from the prisoner was, in most instances, completely unproductive—the prisoner's nicknamed time on the treadmill as 'grinding the wind.'"[65] In its conflation of performance, production and punishment, the treadmill transforms machine labor into an open display of violence. In his description, however, Williams reveals that the treadmill was discursively framed neither as labor nor as punishment, but instead as a performative "dance." Williams explains, "Next morning they put me on the treadmill along with the others: At first, not knowing how to dance it, I cut all my shins with the steps; they did not flog me then—the driver show me how to step, and I catch the step by next day; But them flog all the rest that could not step the mill, flogged them most dreadful."[66] In his description, Williams is forced, with a disturbing fluidity, between performance

[65] Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

[66] James Williams, *A narrative of events, since the first of August, 1834 by James Williams, an apprenticed labourer in Jamaica (*London, [1837?]), Slavery and Anti-Slavery, Gale, 10. Hereafter cited in text.

and punishment, or, rather, performance-as-punishment, as he is forced to "catch the step" of a dance designed to ensure the body's destruction rather than its pleasure.



"Scene from a Jamaica House of Correction"

Source: Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, 240.

In this way, Williams' description aligns the treadmill equally with the dance depicted in Clay's plantation scene and with the melding of bodies and machines common to nineteenth-century depictions of industrial labor. As Williams' description makes clear, the violence that met apprentices consigned to dance the treadmill appeared on two fronts: the driver's whip and the treadmill's unrelenting slats, trapping the apprentices between the interpersonal violence of the

plantation system and the mechanized violence of the mill. Whereas the factory machine ostensibly produced salable commodities, however, the treadmill was designed to consume the incarcerated body itself. Indeed, though the mill produced nothing, "dancing the mill" nonetheless constituted a form of all-consuming labor. Williams explains, "Dancing tread-mill is very hard work, it knock the people up—the sweat all run down from them—the steps all wash up with the sweat that drop from the people, just the same as if you throw water on the steps" (11). The treadmill, in other words, produces the apprentice's body as an object to be not just injured, but wasted for the machine's consumption, as the apprentices' sweat "run down" and coats the machine, merging their "dancing" bodies with the treadmill's whirring slats. The enslaved body, animated by a grotesquely-imagined form of play, comes to resemble nothing so much as the factory machine whose violence participates in that body's painful animation. Williams thus intensifies Warner's description of the plantation as a space of mechanical production by linking it to a violent but also uncanny form of mechanical *reproduction*—the coerced, repetitive spectacles of punishment whose purpose was to make the body available for consumption by machine and the slaveholder spectator alike. If slavery makes the black body "interchangeable and replaceable," Williams's narrative illustrates the dynamics of mechanization underlying that process. In doing so, Williams not only lodges a protest against the slavery system, but also forecasts an industrial modernity in which mechanical production is really synonymous with the consumption of bodies that replace the foodstuffs ordinarily produced by plantation mills, and mechanical reproduction with the indifferent production, control, and destruction of black bodies under slavery.

Williams's narrative and his descriptions of the treadmill thus allows readers to see how the slavery and apprenticeship system in the colonies could be said to apply the dynamics of industrial production and mechanical reproduction to the bodies of the enslaved both to extract labor power and to elicit forms of pain and discipline instrumental for social domination. Both narratives,

however, also provide opportunities to see these systems of mechanized labor and punishment as underwritten by the perhaps even more fundamental connection between mechanical production and the enslaved body found in the biological reproduction of slaves. In the British slavery colonies, in contrast to the American South, reproduction posed a particular problem, as the enslaved population in places like Jamaica failed to reproduce themselves, leading British slaveholders to depend instead on the continual importation of new slaves to the colonies.[67] In the decades between the British ban on the slave trade and abolition, then, British slaveholders focused on finding ways to encourage maternal reproduction in order to maintain the slavery system. Once abolition laws were passed in 1833, this point ostensibly became moot. But as Bridget Brereton has explained, the result was that the years between abolition in 1834 and the end of apprenticeship in 1838 were particularly harsh for pregnant women, as "owners convinced themselves that they no longer had any obligations towards the health or even survival of their apprentices' infants" and nursing mothers were forced into field labor.[68] Consequently, both Warner and Williams draw attention in their narratives to the status of slave mothers under slavery and apprenticeship. After Warner married a fellow field hand, he explains that while he cared for his wife, ultimately he "often grieved that I had taken poor Sally to be my wife; for it caused her more suffering as a mother" (46), particularly since pregnant women were not excepted either from field labor or from punishment: "they had no feeling for the mother or her child, they cared only for the work" (46). Meanwhile, writing in 1837, Williams provides a particularly grim view of the predicament of enslaved women during the apprenticeship period, recounting in graphic detail how one woman, forced to "dance the treadmill" suffers a beating despite her protests, "me no one flesh, me two flesh" (18). In both

[67] See: Kenneth Morgan, "Slave Women and Reproduction in Jamaica, c. 1776-1834," *History* 91, no. 2 (April 2006): 231-253, JStor.

[68] Bridget Brererton, "Family Strategies, Gender and the Shift to Wage Labour in the British Caribbean," *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History*. (Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 1999), 80.

Warner and Williams's accounts, slaveholders and the masters of apprentices not only forcibly seek to divorce maternal reproduction from maternal care, but also work to transform that act of reproduction into a punishable act more likely to result in injury or death than in the production of human life. If in Blake's account, slavery's legacy is a form of corrupt paternalism that forcibly alienates the child from maternal care, Williams and Warner emphasize the physical and emotional pain this legacy caused the slave mother, for whom birth was closely aligned with destruction. In these early texts, maternal care was thus allied with the mechanization, theatricalization, and destruction of the body under slavery in different ways. Turning in the next section to the fiction of Frances Trollope, I will argue that we can begin to see how Trollope came to link these themes together more directly, in order to depict slavery as a system that turned mothers into machines, and in doing so, produced a legacy of human alienation and mechanization that lived on long in England long after slavery's end.

"A Queer Mixture of Fraud, Fun, and Feeling": Frances Trollope's Mother Machines

While guiding readers through the property of wealthy mill-owner Matthew Dowling early in Frances Trollope's 1840 novel *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*, the narrator reaches a fork in her path. To the left is the Lodge, home to the Dowling's "very numerous progeny," where food is in such abundance that it rots, uneaten on its plates.[69] To the right, the factory, "which was the source and head-spring of all the wealth that flowed over, and irrigated with its fructifying stream, meadows, parks, hot-beds, and flower-gardens, till it made itself a prodigious cistern in the depths and heights of Dowling Lodge" (22). In Trollope's description, Dowling Lodge seems not just fecund, but impregnated by the wealth that gathers into a womb-like cistern from which the Dowling's material and procreative excesses seemingly spring. It is only later in the novel, however, that we discover the hidden source from which this wealth is extracted: "the low-priced agony of

[69] Frances Trollope, *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*, ed. Brenda Ayres (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 11. Hereafter cited in text.

labourine infants" who are "made to eke out and supply all that is wanting to enable the giant engines of our factories to out-spin all the world" (236). The industrialist landscape, in other words, is nourished by the unseen bodies hidden within the factory walls. The dying children whose "baby sinews" are fed to the factory engines return to fructify the fruitful pastures and fertile bodies of the wealthy (142). The productions of the factory thus come to seem like maternal reproduction in reverse: the machine destroys the body of the living factory child whose killing labor in turn re-impregnates the system that spawned him. The factory town in *Michael Armstrong* is strangely pregnant with the wasted bodies of its workers.

This opening scene serves to highlight Trollope's pre-occupation with the tragic resemblances between the biological reproductions of the maternal body and the mechanical reproductions of the factory machine. If industrial production comes to seem haunted by human reproduction in *Michael Armstrong*, it is because the factories are likewise haunted by another kind of unseen body, one which would have been familiar to readers of Trollope's 1836 antislavery novel, *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw; or, Scenes on the Mississippi*: the slave mother. While critics have noted that Trollope, like many of her contemporaries, explicitly compares wage labor to chattel slavery throughout *Michael Armstrong*, they have not failed to notice that these direct comparisons often seem to *diminish* the significance of slavery's legacy to the novel—as, for example, when Trollope declares that the "labor and destitution" of child workers in England is "*incomparably more severe*, than any ever produced by negro slavery" (219).[70] It may seem counterintuitive, then, to argue that Trollope's depictions of mechanical reproduction attest to the persistent afterlife of

[70] Priti Joshi, for example, suggests that Trollope's invocations of slavery present a characteristic example of "the charge that attention to those abroad came at the cost of those at home" (xvi). In this way, Joshi's reading of Trollope's fiction appears to follow Catherine Gallagher's assessment that the deployment of slavery as a trope in critiques of industrialism could at times betray apathy and even outright antipathy towards colonial slaves and the antislavery cause. See: Priti Joshi, "Introduction," *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), ix-xxiii; and Gallagher, "Workers and Slaves: The Rhetoric of Freedom in the Debate over Industrialism," *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, 3-35.

slavery within British culture—an afterlife that shapes social relations within the familial sphere as much as on the factory floor. However, as Warner's and Williams's accounts of slavery reveal, it was possible by the 1830s to find a vision of mechanical labor and industrial production on the early nineteenth-century slave plantation. In this section, I will argue that these connections make particular sense once we consider that, in *Whitlaw*, Trollope imagines slavery as a kind of industrial technology—one that refashions slave mothers into machines for the "mechanical" reproduction of Atlantic slaves. In doing so, Trollope returns to the problem of maternal care that was as much at stake in Blake's critique of slavery as in Williams's and Warner's accounts of the slave plantation.

Trollope's conflicted encounter with American slavery began in 1827 when, facing financial difficulties in England, she agreed to sail to America to join her friend and fellow Briton Frances Wright. Wright had come to America to start an experimental commune in Nashoba, Tennessee whose purpose, she writes in her 1826 "Explanatory Notes" on Nashoba, would be "*the protection and regeneration of the race of color, universally oppressed and despised in a country self denominated free.*"[71] These two goals, protection and regeneration, were ultimately to be achieved through emigration and colonization on the one hand, and racial "amalgamation" on the other. Indeed, Wright advocated, among other things, that the commune adopt free love principles in order to free its members from the "tyranny usurped by the matrimonial law," and the stigma of illegitimacy and racial miscegenation, the latter of which she considered a form of human "development."[72] In practice, however, residents at Nashoba, though "working for freedom," remained legally enslaved, and when Trollope arrived at Nashoba in 1827, she was met not with a utopian commune, but rather with a scene of chaos from which she quickly fled, leaving soon thereafter for Cincinnati. Five years later,

[71] Frances Wright, "Explanatory Notes, Respecting the Nature and Objects of the Institution of Nashoba and the Principles Upon Which It Is Founded," *The Correspondent* (New York), Feb. 29, 1828, 94, ProQuest American Periodicals.

[72] Wright, "Explanatory Notes," 108.

in 1832, Trollope published *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*, a travelogue detailing her experiences as an Englishwoman abroad in one of her nation's former colonies. Though critical of American slavery—a position that would win Trollope a notoriety in America that the author herself would go on to satirize in *The Barnabys in America* (1843)—in *Domestic Manners*, Trollope ultimately couched her criticism in an appeal for amelioration rather than abolition.

Nonetheless, four years later, Trollope would go on to produce one of the first antislavery novels in Anglo-America: *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw*. As one of the first social problem novels published in England, *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* indicates the significant role that Britain's attempts to come to terms with its slave past played in the formation of early Victorian realism. While the novel is set in the American South, its 1836 publication—three years following the passage of the Abolition Act, but two years before the end of apprenticeship—suggests that the novel was likely motivated in part by the ongoing debates surrounding abolition, apprenticeship, and emancipation in the British slave colonies throughout this period (despite reviewers' insistence upon the novel's "American" character), a point underscored by the inclusion of a Liverpool slave merchant among the novel's cast of main characters. While *Whitlaw* is set in the American South, in other words, the novel's implied geographic network links the region to Britain's slave trading past (which is unsurprising, given Britain's role in bringing slavery to the American South during the colonial period). In contrast to most conventional reformist fiction, however, Trollope's novel centers around a villain, the eponymous Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw, a plantation overseer defined equally by his cruelty and his narcissism. Born to an upwardly-mobile settler family in Louisiana, Whitlaw moves to Natchez in order to take a position as an overseer on the sprawling plantation of Colonel Dart, one of the wealthiest residents in the state. Meanwhile, Lucy and Edward Bligh witness the sale of the slaves who lived and, by the novel's account, prospered on the Bligh estate after the death of their father. When Edward and Lucy receive word of the cruel treatment that two of their former

slaves, Phebe and Caesar, have received on Colonel Dart's plantation, the pair travel to Louisiana, where Edward ministers to the slave population while attempting to help Phebe and Caesar plan their escape. While there, the Blighs meet the Steinmarks, a German family opposed to slavery on moral grounds. Working together with the Steinmarks, Edward and Lucy assist Caesar in fleeing the Dart estate; at the novel's conclusion, the Steinmarks agree to purchase and manumit the couple before traveling to Westphalia with the Blighs, where Caesar and Phebe will work as household servants. Before they leave Louisiana, however, Edward is discovered preaching to the slaves on Dart's plantation and "lynched" by a band of white slave-owners, led by Whitlaw. Shortly thereafter, the Steinmarks, along with Lucy Bligh, Caesar and Phebe, make their escape to Europe. At the novel's conclusion, Whitlaw is murdered by several of the slaves on his plantation, led by Juno, a slave woman determined to avenge Edward's death and the suicide of her Creole granddaughter, Selina, whose tragic end Whitlaw helped hasten.

While the novel ostensibly centers around the story of Whitlaw's cruelty and Phebe and Caesar's escape, the stark contrast between these figures—the callous overseer and the suffering slaves—in fact occupies relatively little of the novel's narration. Instead, the novel's more developed plots center upon Edward Bligh's doomed pastorship and Juno's equally doomed maternity. In the figure of Edward Bligh and his enslaved congregants, Trollope seems to pose pastorship—both Christian and white—as a utopian and, ultimately, unsustainable (and, in Trollope's description, "fanatical") bulwark against the slave system. In her depiction of Juno, Trollope likewise depicts the maternal feelings of the enslaved as a form of emotion threatened under slavery's reign. But rather than dismiss maternal care as a potential solution to the novel's social problems, Trollope instead transforms it to suggest that the very process of alienation that debilitates the enslaved subject can also provide a fertile ground for developing a radical resistance to the slavery system.

As Trollope introduces her readers to "slave life," she repeatedly emphasizes that the

consumable objects that the slave system exists to produce are the bodies of slaves themselves. Slaves, Whitlaw imagines, "must sweat into dollars uncountable" (49), while Trollope describes the trade as a "traffic in the muscles and sinews of the poor negroes" (60). When Juno visits the Steinmark's plantation, which is not worked by slaves, she immediately notes that the plantation is characterized by a notable *absence* of the signs of reproductive and reproduced bodies: "'Where,' thought Juno, 'do they keep all the children?—Maybe they don't hire breeding servants—and then I expect the little ones don't roll and tumble about the other stock, like ours'" (185). By contrast, on the slave plantation, the production of slave bodies blends into and overtakes the cultivation of land:

> there is no feature more remarkable in a regular slave-peopled plantation or farm than the manner in which the children (the multiplication of this branch of produce being one of the most profitable speculations) are seen lying about in the homestead, some half, some wholly naked, all well fattened and fed, but bearing little more resemblance in attitude and action to the being made in God's own image, than the young swine with whom they associate. (185)

Trollope depicts the plantation as a space in which the reproduction of slaves is substituted for the production of livestock, imagining, in turn, the slave body as "fattened," as if it were a comestible.[73] In the same way that the factory machines in *Armstrong* transform laboring children's bodies into the "fructified" pastures of the Dowling Lodge, slavery turns children into agricultural produce for the consumption of Southern planters. By comparing slaves to livestock, Trollope seems to dehumanize them by depicting slaves not just as akin to animals or to food, but also as a collection of indistinct, interchangeable bodies. However, she also complicates this description by drawing attention to the fact that the abrogation of slave children's humanity is a result of the slave mother's transformation into a technology for the production of human commodities. The slave mother lingers in the

[73] As Charlotte Sussman had detailed, "A tendency to imagine labouring bodies as the food they labored to produce, or as the food whose consumption fueled their labor" was common across eighteenth and nineteenth-century social thought, but particularly in abolitionist rhetoric, where writers hoped to encourage the sentimental consumption of (often dehumanizing) images of laborers' pained bodies in place of the economic consumption of the objects those laborers produced. See: Charlotte Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 115, 116-123.

passage as the unseen source from which the wealth of the "slave-peopled plantation" is materially extracted. But because she has been reduced to an abstraction—a "multiplication" of produce rather than a mother of children—the bodies she produces come to seem more like inert corporeal matter than individuated human subjects. If slave children seem like exchangeable objects available for the consumption of planters, it is because human reproduction has been transformed into an instrument of industrial production.

While the transformation of mother into commercial multiplier is largely invisible here, when Trollope turns to Juno, the novel's slave mother, she narrates this process by drawing on an idiom of industrialization. Trollope's descriptions of Juno emphasize not only her inevitable alienation from the children she produces, but also the way in which that alienation re-produces the maternal body as strangely mechanistic. Trollope explains,

> After ten years of cohabitation, this man [Juno's master] died, leaving her and her eight children still slaves. His executors sold them all to the highest bidders; and it was said that Juno never inquired to whose hands fate had consigned her offspring. For the third time, she became the favourite of her owner, and again bore children; but she performed this task, as she did all others assigned her, much more like a well-regulated machine than a human being, never giving any outward indication whatever of either will, wish, or affections. (129)

Given the slave mother's inevitable separation from the children she produces, the maternal body, in Trollope's description, bears an uncanny resemblance to the "well-regulated machine" found on the factory floor. Trollope thus invokes mechanical reproduction in order to describe the maternal reproductions that characterized, in Trollope's view, "one of the most profitable speculations" of the slavery economy. In her recent work, Elissa Marder has urged us to rethink the biological category of "motherhood" as the technological category of the "maternal function" which haunts cultural products ranging from writing and photography to agriculture and factory labor, linked to childbearing by their connection to what she calls "principles of reproducibility."[74] Doing so allows

[74] Elissa Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Fordham University

us to see the varied domains in which mechanical and maternal reproduction are entwined, and the ways in which the maternal function "opens up a strange space in which birth and death, *bios* and *techné*, the human and the nonhuman are brought into an intimate and disturbing proximity with one another."[75] In her depictions of Juno's mechanical maternity, however, Trollope suggests that it is not just the maternal function in general, but slave maternity more specifically that haunts modern mechanical reproduction, and especially the mechanical productions of early nineteenth-century factory machinery. More importantly, in Trollope's depiction, the slave mother not only evokes but indeed *becomes* a kind of mechanical technology, as she is coerced into assuming responsibility for the reproduction of commodified slave bodies and, with them, the slavery system itself.

If one of the consequences of Juno's automation is that she models a form of mechanization familiar from the English factory, however, Trollope suggests that another, equally important consequence, is that the feelings siphoned off from Juno come to be reanimated in a distinctively English romanticism. On the one hand, Trollope suggests that Juno enables the reproduction of a British cosmopolitan romanticism, one which both arises from and steals away the imaginative powers of the slave subject. On the other hand, once Juno gives rise to this particular cultural production, these implied lines of filiation are severed, rendering Juno at once more machine-like

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Press, 2012), 3.

[75] Marder, 2. Marder's description of the "maternal function" can also help us see how the destruction of human recognition produced by slavery's "kinlessness" and its co-optation of maternal reproduction runs parallel to the destruction of "aura" Walter Benjamin attributes to the mechanical reproduction of the work of art, whose "uniqueness," Benjamin writes, "is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition" ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schoken Books, 1968), 223). For Benjamin, "in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation," mechanical reproduction "reactivates the object reproduced" (221). By contrast, kinlessness actively works to forestall any kind of recognition of the commodified person. Capturing the "mechanical" process of slavery maternity and the reproduction of kinlessness, however, ultimately enables Trollope to explore the possibilities for "reactivating" the enslaved mother as a novelistic character capable of wielding her own mechanization to radical ends by the novel's conclusion.

and at a further remove from the culture she helped create.

Trollope reveals partway through the novel that in her youth, Juno gave birth to a daughter with a Liverpool merchant, who ultimately sells Juno and moves with his daughter back to England, where he raises her as a freewoman. Years later, Juno's granddaughter, Selina, returns from England to America, where she and Juno are reunited (only to be parted again when Selina, upon discovering her slave ancestry, commits suicide). In Trollope's description, Juno's act of maternal reproduction results in a surprising racial substitution, such that the American slave mother becomes, as Trollope explains, "the progenitor of a white and beautiful free race in England" (173). It may seem as though Trollope intends to highlight the irrecoverable gap between Juno's unfreedom and the white freedom bolstered by her subjection. But when Trollope shifts attention momentarily from racial tropes to cultural ones, she reveals that Selina's romantic sensitivities are in fact a mirror-image of Juno's now deadened reserves of feeling. Though Juno is marked throughout the novel by her uncouth wildness, her back story reveals that that wildness is not solely the product of some racialized primitivism but rather derives in part from her cosmopolitan education. Raised by a European family, Juno's childhood is spent "wholly in reading, and that reading was of the most miscellaneous kind furnished by a New Orleans circulating library" (128). When Juno is later sold to an English settler, he, "struck by her unusual acquirements…conversed with her as with a being of intellectual faculties equal to his own; furnished her with all the most stirring poetry of his country, for the gratification of seeing how it would work on her wild imagination" (128), before departing abruptly for England with their daughter and plunging Juno into the automaton-like state described above.

What Selina inherits from Juno, then, is not only a biological racial bloodline but also an acutely "romantic" sensitivity—one that is largely stolen from Juno at the moment that her daughter is seized from her. When Juno first pays a visit to Selina, Trollope explains that the girl's response to

the racial subjection she sees around her is tinged by her tendency towards overwrought fancy:

> But had she been engaged in an occupation less delightful than that of reading Spenser, this interruption [of a woman asking for charity] would still have been distasteful to her. The oppressed and suffering condition of the coloured people at New Orleans was a source of constant annoyance to her comfort; yet she had a fanciful theory of her own respecting them, which, though it never could have led her generous and gentle temper to treat them harshly, made all intercourse with them in some degree painful and degrading. She firmly believed that this marked and hitherto most unhappy race were the descendants of Cain, and her feelings towards them were the result of both superstitious abhorrence and wounded compassion. (239)

Trollope highlights here the contradictory legacy that Selina's tendency towards "romance" imparts to her. On the one hand, she becomes, in this scene, a convincing heir to both the "wild imagination" and the romantic literary education that Juno embodied as a young woman, and that was lost to her upon her separation from her daughter. At the same time, it is precisely Selina's "romantic" sensibilities that obstruct her abilities to recognize not only the demands of sympathy that Juno's abjection ought to make upon her, but also the intimate connections between Selina's deepest pleasures (represented here by her reading of Spenser) and Juno's own—connections that point towards the ways in which Selina's consciousness is shaped by her enslaved grandmother. The failures of recognition dramatized by Selina's misidentification as wholly white, English, and free produce the romantic racialization that Trollope makes the object of critique here. Perhaps more importantly, however, they also illustrate a process according to which Juno's maternal reproduction projects her sentience onto progeny who, in their initial separation and later refusal of recognition, effectively steal that sentience away from her.

On the one hand, then, Juno produces a genealogical line of British citizens, who appear to be white, beautiful and free but whose very whiteness, beauty and freedom arises from their occluded enmeshments with the slave trade and the bodies of slaves whose abjection renders them, in Selina's view, as black, debased, and unfree. By implicating not just a single family line, but rather English romance itself in the story of Selina's misrecognitions, Trollope implies that not just the

Croft family, but, indeed, British romantic culture itself ought to be recognized as a hybrid production whose development is closely intertwined with cosmopolitan cultural sites like nineteenth-century New Orleans, and with English culture's unspoken intimacy with not just the "slave trade" as a system, but also with particular slaves, whose lives might not be nearly as distant as later Victorian accounts of slavery would imply. If Trollope asks readers to trace how a seemingly autonomous British culture has been mediated through encounters with slaves abroad, however, she also asks us to recognize the damage that these encounters yield for those slaves who, like Juno, appear to lose their sense of agency through the twin processes of maternal and cultural alienation that Selina's story dramatizes.

Indeed, in *Whitlaw*, Trollope succeeds in making visible to readers the ways in which Juno's masters have conscripted her to intimate relationships and the pleasures of maternal care only in order to facilitate the painful extraction of the children those relations produce:

> She remembered the wanton development of all the faculties in herself which had opened so many new avenues of torture to her heart,…She recalled with maddening truth the first warm touch of her dear infant's lips upon her bosom,—the last agonizing kiss that she was permitted to press upon them as she was torn away from her, the savage transfer of her loathing person to another—the brutal force that kept her soul and body in a subjection that seemed to make every breath she drew a poison to her nature… (268)

In Trollope's description, Juno's memories of motherhood are reduced to the bodily sensations of the "warm touch" and "agonizing kiss" that in their very pleasure become "new avenues of torture," when those attachments are disrupted. Juno thus embodies the process whereby family feeling is re-made, under slavery, into a far more precarious collection of corporeal gestures and impressions that cede, at the instant that mother and child first touch, from expressions of love to another mechanism of brutality. As Juno undergoes a "savage transfer" out of motherhood and back into the economy of the slave trade, she not only experiences a painful separation from her child, but also comes to realize that her parental love has been turned into a weapon, one which transforms

child into commodity, breath into poison, kisses into agony, the heart into an object of torture.

But while Trollope depicts Juno's emotional estrangement as tragic here, at other moments, she mines that same estranged effect for comedic purposes. Early in the novel, Trollope describes Juno, appearing before Whitlaw and Colonel Dart who, "comfortably seated at breakfast, [were] amicably discoursing upon the number of stripes that a female slave might safely receive without permanent injury to herself or her future progeny" (158). As the men thus appear engaged in a debate about the very modes by which the maternal body might serve as a conduit for both pain and the production of progeny, Juno appears. In Trollope's description of Juno in this scene, however, she foregrounds not her maternity but rather her theatricality:

> This queer mixture of fraud, fun, and feeling, never enjoyed herself more than when she saw the savage, blood-thirsty Colonel Dart fawning upon her as gently as a lamb when bleating to its mother for food. She knew—for her comfort—that she had been his torment and his torture for the fifteen years that he had possessed the estate, making him dream by night and meditate by day on plots, poisonings, and assassinations without end. (158)

In her characterization of Juno as an amalgam of "fraud, fun, and feeling," Trollope highlights the peculiar nature of Juno's status in the novel, as her continual acts of dissimulation serve to undermine Whitlaw and Dart's totalizing power at the cost of rendering Juno a "queer mixture" of eccentricities that mask any depiction of Juno's "feeling" behind an inscrutable mask of "fun"—one that risks turning Juno's pain into a comedic pleasure for readers of Trollope's novel.

Indeed, Juno's limited agency appears, throughout the novel, to derive from her ability to adopt a stereotypical persona of mystical madness couched in an exaggerated minstrel dialect. Earlier in the novel, for example, Juno bursts in on Whitlaw as he attempts to rape Phebe, and thwarts his act of punishment by playing on Whitlaw's superstitious fears of the "negro sorceress" (188). As Juno enters the scene, she cries out the lyrics of "Coal Black Rose," a song that, Brenda Ayres notes, was popular on the minstrel stage in the 1830s, which she follows with a speech in an exaggerated dialect notably absent from Juno's "offstage" speech: "'I say, massa clerk,' said the old negress, again

suspending her mirth—'I say, massa, you come wid me under dem black trees, and I teach you summat;—but step softly, massa—don't scare de green birds—they are Juno's spirits'" (88). While these performances seem to lend Juno a limited power within slavery's constraints, they also risk repositioning slavery's violence as a form of capering "fraud" and "fun" that belongs to comedy rather than tragedy.

Though Juno's performances ostensibly grant her the power to protect Phebe by terrifying Whitlaw and Dart, however, these performances ultimately serve to reinforce Juno's resemblance to the factory machine—a resemblance that overshadows any sense of resistant agency those performances might contain. In her description of Juno's theatrical gestures, Trollope goes on to emphasize her body's strange jerkiness and its exaggerated expressiveness, as it moves abruptly between animation and deformation: "Her pace was a singular mixture of activity and decrepitude, every step being something between a jump and a hobble. When she reached the door, she turned to see if he whom she had summoned were [sic] following her; and on perceiving that he still stood beside the girl as if undecided, she twisted her uncouth features into a most portentous frown, and raising her bamboo, seemed to be drawing figures with it in the air" (88). In its indeterminate movement between "activity" and "decrepitude," liveliness and debilitation, this depiction of Juno's body highlights the similarities between Juno's minstrel performances and her ambivalent status as a kind of machine. When Juno returns once again to protect Phebe later in the novel, Trollope writes, "It would be tedious to recount the glidings and slidings, the creepings and crawlings, the unseen exits and the unsuspected entrances, by which Juno learned all she wanted to know…the effect of her agency may be easily traced without all the intricacies of the machinery she employed" (131). While Trollope intends to describe Juno's willful machinations, these descriptions of her body, lively yet repetitive, also render Juno machine-like. Though Juno has long since ceased to produce children, she continues to reproduce performances in which she takes on the automated quality of a

body remade as a machine. Once her body has been transformed into a mechanical technology, in other words, Juno likewise becomes a vehicle for the production of automated, iterative spectacles that slide unstably between tactical fraud, comedic fun, and melodramatic feeling.

In her "singular mixture…of activity and decrepitude," Juno's mechanistic mode of gestural expression exemplifies what Sianne Ngai, in *Ugly* Feelings, refers to as "animatedness." "Animatedness," for Ngai, constitutes a state of "being moved" that, over time, took on a specifically racialized meaning as it came to define an aesthetic of the "overemotional racialized subject, unusually receptive to external control."[76] In making the subject "come alive," artists' representations of (usually racialized) subjects in states of "animation"—liveliness, zest, but also agitation—at the same time underscored the ease with which those subject might pass back into the inert state from which they had come; the "animated" figure is one who appears overly active, but whose activity, spurred on as it is by the application of an outer force or agent, remains shadowed by its fundamentally lifeless interior state. Animatedness, in other words, "manages to fuse signs of the body's subjection to power with signs of its ostensive freedom."[77] Blending repetition and spontaneity, however, animatedness is also underwritten by a kind of automatization, linking the racialized subject not only to the inert or lifeless condition of a body without a soul, but also to the industrial machinery of the mechanical age.[78] Undoubtedly, throughout the novel, Trollope at times draws on principles of animatedness to portray enslaved characters as emotional automatons best fit for sentimental or comedic consumption. For example, when another enslaved character, Phebe, mourns her mother, Mrs. Steinmark marvels, "it is the prettiest thing in the world, too, to watch Phebe's little April showers when she thinks of her poor mother; for then again comes the bright

[76] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings:* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 92.

[77] Ibid., 100.

[78] Ibid., 92, 100.

sunshine of love and hope, and her tears are dried in an instant" (340-1). But when she turns to Juno, perhaps alone among the novel's enslaved characters, Trollope complicates Ngai's account by suggesting that Juno's "queer" animatedness comes from her participation in a system that transforms maternity into a mode of mechanical reproduction, and that her mechanical maternity might ultimately provide a resource for resistance as well as domination.[79] By linking the tragedy of slave maternity and the comedic animatedness of Juno's performances, Trollope portrays Juno as a subject whose emotional life is so estranged that she becomes unpredictable and unreadable. This opacity proves strategically useful to Juno within the course of the novel, but it also allows Trollope to suggest that where traditional configurations of subjectivity, premised on the tidy organization of intention, will, embodied action, and emotional response, are thrown into disorder, new possibilities for agentive action and reaction might open up for the abjected subject.

Following the death of Selina, Juno's granddaughter, Juno becomes animated by the drive for revenge. Trollope explains that as Juno "retraced…the long account of all she had endured from the tyrannous power usurped over her unoffending race by the cruel strength of their white brethren," she is reanimated by "over-excited faculties" that "seemed to have recovered all the vigour of youth" (268). It is here that Juno recounts the moment when her child "was torn away from her" that transformed maternal love into a form of "torture to her heart" (268). Yet as Juno lies, "trembling and exhausted" by these reflections, Trollope explains, "Some feeling arising from a consciousness of the power she held over many human agents stole soothingly upon her senses" (269). Determined to seek revenge against Whitlaw, in other words, Juno uncovers within her performances of "fraud, fun, and feeling" a sense of agency that arises, not unlike the alien powers

[79] By observing the interplay of playful and tragic forms of mechanization that define Trollope's characters, we might also come to see Trollope's style as a kind of precursor to the postmodern aesthetics that Rey Chow describes in "Postmodern Automatons" (*Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 101-117). In that essay, Chow argues that postmodern comedy and modern theory share a tendency towards the "automatization" of the subjects they depict.

to which she has been subject throughout the novel, almost against her will, as her "exhausted" body is overridden by this excessive, animating excitement. In this final instance, however, Juno is able to wield that excitement to carry out an act of violent revolt that challenges her status as a cog in the plantation machine, through a recuperation of her very mechanistic state. As Juno watches her fellow slaves violently murder Whitlaw, Trollope notes that, "The ghastly spectacle [of Whitlaw's murder] wrought no change in the feelings of Juno. She steadily watched the death-agony, and then raising her eyes to heaven, exclaimed, 'Selina!—my own Selina!—Edward!—saint and martyr of our wretched race!—old Juno has avenged ye!" (381). The alienation of the body from subjective, interior "feeling" has, throughout the novel, rendered Juno not only theatrical but also so mechanical as to render her fundamentally opaque. Whereas in earlier scenes, however, the reader is led to understand that opacity as the sign of a sorrow so pervasive that it has left Juno bereft of both her will and her sanity, the novel's closing scenes ask us to revise our understanding of Juno's "frauds" one last time, in order to see how the alienated performer can also incite radical social upheaval. Once the fundamental relationship between the body and the will has been ruptured, Trollope seems to suggest, it becomes nearly impossible to detect the disruptive potential that might come back to life within the bodies of the enslaved. Juno's resemblance to the machine might, in other words, ultimately work to undo the mechanisms of the slave system that Juno was initially instrumentalized to reproduce.

The characterological instability Juno's mechanical motherhood produces thus provides a framework for antislavery resistance that rests upon the inhumanly mechanized, and therefore illegible, qualities of the slave mother.[80] Though this illegibility produces a distance between novel

[80] In *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), Tamara Ketabgian argues that Dickens similarly portrays machines as "representing powerfully charged forms of affect, irrationality and irregularity" (49) that contain the potential for resistance, particularly when those feelings take the form of "melancholy…an emotional effect born of accretion" (56): in Dickens's writing, "monotonous and

reader and enslaved character that can risk replacing empathy with an exploitive form of readerly spectatorship, Trollope ultimately puts this risk to use to surprise readers with a scene of explicit resistance that, as critics of the novel have noted, would rarely be reproduced in later antislavery novels of the period. Within the world of the novel, Juno's resistance has limited consequences; at the novel's end, the slavery system remains. More lasting for Trollope are the effects Juno's mechanical form of maternity has on her interpretation of the possibilities and limitations of protest fiction in her later antislavery novel, *The Barnabys in America* (1843), where Trollope suggests that the modern author might represent another instance of the mother machine.

The Barnabys in America was the third novel published in Trollope's *Widow Barnaby* series, which traced the comedic exploits of the widowed and then re-married Martha Barnaby. The opening of *The Barnabys in America* finds Barnaby married to an inveterate gambler, who quickly falls into a high society scrape in England. Consequently, Barnaby and her husband decide to flee with their daughter, Patti, to the American South. Once they arrive, Barnaby decides that she will ingratiate herself to the locals by posing as a famous but unnamed English author who has come to America to write a book about her experiences there, in the style of Frances Trollope's *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Like Trollope, who traveled to America and established an authorial career in order to help support her husband and children, Martha Barnaby promises to merge authorship and motherhood, using her (entirely fictional) literary fame to win the patronage of a wealthy Southern family who take in the Barnaby family.

In the novel's opening pages, Trollope in fact prepares readers for the story of authorial

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obedient actions convey a destructive and deeply emotional potential for revolt, on the part of both the machinery and of other nonhuman and subordinate groups" (49). Ultimately, Ketabgian argues, this potential for violence concealed beneath automation and apparent obedience also becomes endemic to Dickens's characters, which in turn "urges us to treat visions of mechanical regularity as expressions of deeply emotional forces, both on the part of machines and on the part of people" (70)—even as those expressions resist "established ways of thinking about literary character and allied notions of psychic simplicity and complexity" (66).

motherhood about to unfold by inviting readers to consider the *Widow Barnaby* novels as a kind of maternal production: "[T]here is a parental love," Trollope explains, "so purely spiritual, so wholly intellectual, as to place it in sublimity far above any other affection of the human heart."[81] What is this sublime form of parental affection? She goes on to reveal that it is the affection an author feels for her characters: though "[There are m]any, strange to say, who affect a total indifference, nay, almost oblivion, concerning these offsprings of the brain, for whom, by every law, human and divine, they ought to feel the tenderest partiality," Trollope assures us: "Far otherwise is it with the progenitor of the Widow Barnaby. I scruple not to confess that with all her faults, and she has *some*, I love her dearly" (11). As for those authors who do not feel similarly, she warns, "'Let no such men be trusted'—it is doing them injustice to believe that they can be sincere" (11).

But while Trollope promises us a novel where parental affection will ensure authorial sincerity, the literary career of Martha Barnaby thoroughly satirizes the notion of the author as loving mother sincerely attached to the "offsprings of [her] brain." Early in the novel, Martha Barnaby reveals that her chronicle of American life will in fact pose a direct rebuke to English depictions of America, *Domestic Manners* included, that criticized the U.S. for its slavery system. Barnaby explains that the novel's slaveholder, Mrs. Beauchamp, "declares that there has never yet been a single volume written upon the United States, that was not crammed with the most abominable lies from beginning to end, and…any body who would come forward to contradict all these wicked and most scandalous falsehoods, would be rewarded in the very noblest manner possible: first, by a great quantity of money; and next, by the admiration and respect of all the people in the country" (63). Ironically accusing Trollope's own *Domestic Manners* of insincerity, Mrs. Barnaby promises to produce a volume defending American slavery motivated not by any interest in slavery, but instead purely to win fame and fortune for herself and her family. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then,

[81] Frances Trollope, *The Barnabys in America, or the Widow Wedded* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 11. Hereafter cited in text.

when the Barnabys are ultimately forced to flee the South and take refuge with a family of Quakers in Philadelphia, Mrs. Barnaby does not hesitate to reverse course and repackage her promised travelogue as a critique of slavery to win the favor of her new hosts.

By transforming authorship into a rote, performative endeavor, detached to any sincere political position or social sympathy, Barnaby contorts the maternal act of literary production Trollope introduces on the novel's first page into another act of mechanical reproduction, as she promises to recirculate the prevailing opinions of the characters who surround her without any apparent emotional or ethical investment in the material at hand. If Trollope presents herself as the model mother-author in the novel's opening pages, the story of Mrs. Barnaby that follows presents us with a form of literary production more closely akin to Juno's automated and alienated maternity. Indeed, throughout the novel, readers are invited to compare Barnaby to the African American slaves she meets in America, most notably in her travels from the slave South, through Quaker Philadelphia, to upstate New York, mirroring the path traced by fugitive slaves. Trollope underscores the comparison, for example, when some of the novel's British characters puzzle over the advertisements for runaway slaves they find in a local newspaper, bridging Barnaby's mercenary pursuit of publicity in the form of the pro-slavery treatise with another, more ghastly instance where slavery, publicity, and print circulation meet.

But perhaps the most interesting basis for this comparison comes when Mrs. Barnaby interacts directly with the novel's enslaved characters. As she prepares to write her proslavery treatise, Mrs. Beauchamp offers her a drawing room to write in and delicacies to sustain her. As she does so, the slaveholder calls forth two slave girls to serve their guest: "Upon this two handsome negro-girls made their appearance, side by side, at the door, and with a movement so similar and simultaneous, that they rather looked like one piece of machinery than two self-moving human beings" (193). Meanwhile, when the author accepts Mrs. Beauchamp's gifts and her praise, Trollope

notes that Mrs. Barnaby "drew forth her pocket-handkerchief to catch the drops that emotion forced to flow" (193). At the height of this emotional outpouring, "the black automatons reappeared at this moment, each bearing a tray" (193). Ostensibly, Mrs. Barnaby's exaggerated emotions are meant to contrast the automation of the enslaved women who surround her. Where their actions are routinized and dehumanized, stripped of any sign of emotionality or intentionality, Barnaby's ongoing acts of deception are accompanied by melodramatic effusions, celebrating her powers of performance as a comic assertion of her impressively calculating will. But viewed from another angle, the performative qualities of this emotional display—the tears wrung forcibly from her eyes and the uncomfortable lies about the American South wrung with equal force from her pen—tend to recast those effusions as similarly impersonal, estranged, and therefore mechanical in their own right. As the Widow shifts her sympathies and her expressions of emotion to suit the needs of her changing situation in America, her performance of sensibility renders Barnaby another automaton bound up in what Trollope elsewhere in the novel describes as the "native manufactory" of literary production (86).

In the novel's closing pages, Trollope reveals that the mechanical labor of the slaves who have appeared throughout has in fact all along resided closer to the disingenuous performances of Mrs. Barnaby than either the novel's characters or its readers could have known. As the novel draws to a close, Barnaby and her family return to the American South, where they arrive just in time to witness a slave revolt on the Beauchamp's plantation. While the novel's characters collude with a faithful slave to save the Beauchamp women, two Southern patriarchs are murdered. In this suddenly violent conclusion, Trollope, as Christine Sutphin has suggested, reveals the deception at the heart of the novel's enslaved characters' "automated" performance of obedient and automatic servility. In doing so, she establishes an important connection to Mrs. Barnaby's strangely alienated, and therefore mechanical performances of authorship—a performance that itself echoes the novel's

own tonal slipperiness. While the estranged, automated actions of the enslaved symbolize their exploitation, they also provide cover for a violent resistance to the slavery system that takes shape within the world of the novel. In the same way, Mrs. Barnaby's insincere pro- and anti-slavery rhetoric transforms reformist writing of the kind Trollope produced into a "mechanically" reproducible literary form, one that even a novice like Barnaby can impersonate. But while this mechanistic view of reformist realism might at first seem to cast doubt upon Trollope's own authorial productions, ultimately it is also what allows Trollope to craft such a deeply unstable moral and narrative landscape, where revolt and resistance, as Sutphin has argued, "erupts" out of comedy and conventionality.[82]

If in *Whitlaw* Juno's mechanical maternity both rendered her a victim of the slavery system and provided the grounds for her resistance to that system, in *The Barnabys in America*, Trollope finds that the mother machine can also provide a model for the author of reformist fictions who seeks not to preach to audiences but rather to surprise and confound them. While at some moments this mechanical mode of authorship can seem incoherent, both aesthetically and politically, at other moments it seems to provide Trollope with opportunities to critique both the culture of sentiment that surrounded antislavery protest throughout the eighteenth century, and the complicated personal and professional motives that underwrite the industry of social problem fictions authored in large part by white, British women. In this way, Trollope extends Blake's suggestion that the slave mother might provide a model for literary production, in spite of, or perhaps because of, her painful alienation. Once Trollope has drawn on this model to thoroughly dismantle the antislavery novel's frame of sincerity, however, it becomes difficult to know how to read the scenes depicted within it. In the course of the novel, for example, Trollope reveals that the Beauchamps are neighbors with the Whitlaw family featured in her earlier novel, whose plantation is now run by Jonathan's

[82] Christine Sutphin, "'Very Nearly Smiling': Comedy and Slave Revolt in *The Barnabys in America*." *Women's Writing* 18, no. 2 (2011): 226. Taylor & Francis Online.

benevolent Aunt Cleo. In *Barnabys*, the slaves of the Whitlaw plantation are depicted as happy and contented, much like the grateful slaves who escape the American South with the Steinmarks at the end of *Whitlaw*. But given the tonal instability of the narration in *Barnabys*, it is difficult to know just where Trollope's sympathies truly lie. More importantly, by crafting a narrative universe that proves so difficult to read, Trollope has taken Juno's opacity and transformed it into a kind of stylistic effect, one that seems equally skeptical of American slavery, American abolition, and British fiction's capacity to intervene on slaves' behalf. This effect fails to provide the kind of explicit critique of slavery that modern readers will surely hope for. Where it succeeds, however, is in suggesting that it may be difficult if not impossible for the British novelist to avoid finding herself implicated in the economic and affective injustices of the slavery system, even when she sets out to protest against them.

Legacies of the Mother Machine: Inheriting Slavery in Frances Trollope's Industrial Fiction

In the final section of this chapter, I will trace the ways in which Trollope establishes the genealogical relation between slavery and British industrialism in her factory novel, *Michael Armstrong*, a novel whose depiction of Britain's industrial future continually refers back to the slavery Trollope depicted in *Whitlaw*. By reading the abandoned, broken children who populate *Armstrong* as the figurative "offspring" that Juno's mechanical maternity produces, we can begin to see how allusions to slavery structure the story of familial alienation that Trollope tells in *Michael Armstrong*.

Published in 1839-40, *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* ostensibly represents a decisive turn away from slavery and towards domestic poverty in the emergence of the early Victorian social problem novel as a genre. The novel centers on the eponymous Michael Armstrong, a young boy who, along with his brother Edward, works grueling hours inside of the local factory. After his brief adoption by Matthew Dowling, the factory's cruel owner, he is sent off to serve as an "apprentice" at the cotton mill at Deep Valley—a place so degraded that the child

workers infamously compete for scraps from a pig trough outside the mill. Michael eventually makes his escape, whereupon he witnesses Dowling's violent death before reuniting in Germany with his brother, who has been adopted by Mary Brotherton, the daughter of a local mill owner. In its celebration of Mary's benevolence and her quest for knowledge of the factory system, the novel appears to contribute to the development of many of the most contentious features of the industrial novel: its claims to uncover the shocking but hidden conditions of the working classes, even as it "documents" those conditions in the register of melodrama and romance; its emphasis upon the value of middle-class knowledge over a commitment to meaningful political action; and, above all, its putative paternalism, which supplants the desire for new social relations with a nostalgia for a model of class interdependency and middle or upper-class pastorship that Carlyle would go on to extol in *Past and Present* (1843).[83] But though British abolition was finally achieved two years prior to the publication of *Armstrong*, slavery returns in the novel to take shape as an "afterlife" in Victorian British culture.

As critics have noted, Trollope's novel explicitly and infamously compares wage labor to chattel slavery. Halfway through the novel, for example, the narrator pauses to reflect upon the novel's depictions of the misery inside of the factories. Following a particularly harrowing scene, Trollope writes,

> It is a very fearful crime in a country where public opinion has been proved (as in the African Slave Trade), to be omnipotent, for any individual to sit down with a shadow of doubt respecting such statements on his mind. …woe to those who supinely sit in

[83] In *Feeling for the Poor: Bourgeois Compassion, Social Action, and the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2010), for example, Carolyn Betensky argues "Trollope's unwavering focus on and glorification of the pursuit of knowledge as a (or, for the most part, *the*) middle-class response to social injustice works to displace and to defer other sorts of remediation (such as the redistribution of wealth)" (26), supplanting a vision of economic or social transformation for a vision of middle-class "moral capital" that bolsters that class's (and particularly women in the middle class) comfort and rule while "blurring" their focus on the sufferings of the working class (44). For a reading of Carlyle's "antimodern" stance in relation to industrial fiction, see Zlotnick, "'A World Turned Upside Downwards': Men, Dematerialization, and the Disposition-of-England Question," *Women, Writing and the Industrial Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 13-61.

> contented ignorance of the facts, soothing their spirits and their easy consciences with the cuckoo note, "*exaggeration*," while thousands of helpless children pine away their unnoted, miserable lives, in labour and destitution, incomparably more severe, than any ever produced by negro slavery" (219).

Trollope's seems here to follow the model Gallagher proposes in that she acknowledges the successes of the antislavery movement as the basis for her own particular form of advocacy, which depends upon rousing "public opinion" to the cause of industrial reform, while at the same time denying a potential coalition between local and global concerns by arguing that free labor is "incomparably more severe" than colonial slavery. In her reading of this passage, Priti Joshi argues we ought to hear in this protest a claim similar to the one that is often impugned to Dickens' *Bleak House* in his portrayal of Mrs. Jellyby—that concern for subjection "at a distance" is really only an excuse for ignorance and inaction at home, which in turn implies that writers like Dickens and Trollope sought to replace what Dickens famously described as "telescopic philanthropy" with an isolationist concern for the English underclasses.[84] By contrast, Susan Zlotnick argues that Trollope is unique among industrial novelists in linking the production of British textiles directly to cotton produced by slaves in the American south, claiming that Trollope "draws out affiliations between the Old and New Worlds" in order to avoid the hypocrisy of railing against what she calls the "suppression of production" at home while ignoring the role slaves played in enabling that production abroad.[85] However, Zlotnick, too, ultimately aligns Trollope with a particular nostalgia for slavery, arguing, "she returns to Nashoba imaginatively in *Michael Armstrong*, a 'Rhingau paradise' (396), where the former factory children she raises as 'enlightened citizens' replace—but also recall—the black slaves of Nashoba. Mary Brotherton's Pygmalion-like scheme, funded through the profits of her father's mill, is a utopian solution to the abuses of child labor, but one that, like Nashoba, oddly mixes Old World paternalism with New World egalitarianism in its desire to make

[84] Joshi, "Introduction," xv-xvi.

[85] Zlotnick, *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution*, 135.

ladies and gentleman out of mill children."[86]

In this final section, I will argue that Trollope does rewrite the slave past in her depiction of industrialism in *Michael Armstrong*, but that she does so less to triumph "Pygmalion-like" attempts to achieve what Gayatri Spivak calls the "soul making" of wage and chattel slaves, than to trace the ways in which the slavery system's somatic and affective economy resurfaces inside the English factory, exposing both the deformity of pastorship within the factory system and the ways in which that acutely modern deformation is shaped by Britain's intimate encounters with the circum-Atlantic slave trade. Throughout *Armstrong*, Trollope re-imagines industrial capitalism as a system in which working-class bodies are produced, consumed, and pressed into performances, collapsing distinctions between the industrial production of the commodity—which objectifies and so occludes the embodied labor that produced the commodity—and slavery, which makes the body itself into a commodity, turning that body into a surrogate and source of enjoyment for the slave-owner. While it would, perhaps, be possible to read Trollope's somatization of mechanical production without reference to slavery, to do so would overlook the ways in which Trollope's critique of industrialism emerges out of her depictions of Juno's "mechanical" motherhood in *Whitlaw*.[87] Reading these spaces and their representation in Trollope's fiction illuminates the intimate relations between the maternal reproduction of slaves and the mechanical destruction of working-class bodies, revealing the peculiar ways in which maternal care and social violence are imbricated across Trollope's fiction. If Juno produces a "white and beautiful free race in England" in *Whitlaw*, she also stands, in the lineage of Trollope's fiction, as a kind of progenitor for the depiction of free laborers that Trollope produces in *Michael Armstrong*.

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[86] Ibid., 138.

[87] Zlotnick, for example, argues that Trollope and Tonna both stress the materiality of labor in order to counter the suppression of the material effects of production that in part defines industrial capitalism.

Trollope begins her investigation of the factory system by turning her attention to the hypocrisies of antislavery millowners, who profess sympathy with slaves abroad while ignoring the plight of factory workers at home. These ironies center on Mary Brotherton and her father, who schooled Mary in abolitionist rhetoric while keeping his own acts of local exploitation from her:

> On the question of negro slavery, she had from her earliest infancy heard a great deal, for her father was an anti-(black)-slavery man, who subscribed to the African society, and the missionary fund; drank Mr. Wilberforce's health after dinner whenever he had company at his table; and while his own mills daily sent millions of groans to be registered in heaven from joyless young hearts and infant limbs, he rarely failed to despatch…a plentiful portion of benevolent lamentations over the sable sons of Africa, all uttered comfortably from a soft arm-chair, while digestion was gently going on, and his well-fed person in a state of the most perfect enjoyment. (177)

While Trollope draws a contrast here between Brotherton's fellow-feeling for slaves abroad and his willful blindness towards his workers' privations closer to home, more significant is the way in which Trollope portrays not just his *opulence*, but also his *corpulence*. As Trollope describes Brotherton's body as both "well-fed" and caught up in "digestion," she implies that Brotherton's corporeal acts of consumption are linked to the enjoyment that comes from his "lamentations" over slavery as much as to the agony of "infant limbs" that Trollope describes. While Trollope appears to contrast Brotherton's antislavery "benevolence" to his pro-industrialist indifference, I would argue that Trollope in fact positions *both* slaves and workers as fodder for Brotherton's "perfect enjoyment," as his gut and his sentiments are fed equally by the spectacles of suffering to which Trollope alludes here.

I open with this passage to gesture towards the complex somatic economy running through Trollope's novel, within which the painful destruction of industrial bodies and the corporeal comforts of the industrialist are mediated by (and therefore linked through) the specter of the slave, which appears again and again throughout the novel. By gesturing towards the slave plantation here, Trollope appears to claim distance between that space and the space of the factory; however, she

also alludes back to the "fattened" and therefore comestible corpus of the enslaved she described in *Whitlaw*, who now stand as precursors to the working-class bodies whose destruction indirectly "feeds" Brotherton's corpulent body. By comparing slaves to workers, in other words, Trollope effectively collapses distinctions between the unmediated structures of pleasure, destruction, and surrogacy that characterize slavery and the seemingly more abstracted relations of production and consumption that cause working-class bodies to suffer and starve while simultaneously feeding the aristocracy under industrial capitalism.

This crucial linkage between the abstracted labor of the industrial worker and the (direct) enjoyment of the body of the enslaved not only establishes a relation between slavery and industrialism that tends to be discounted in the novel, but also helps explain the peculiar relation between the destruction of the working-class body and the production of food (as opposed to textiles) that characterizes Trollope's depictions of the factory. Indeed, Trollope's most vivid descriptions of the factory system depend upon imagining workers' bodies not just as injured or destroyed, but also as consumed or fed to the engines of production, while industrial wealth is imagined as a foodstuff. As Mr. Bell, the novel's reformist minister, explains to Mary, "I cursed the boasted manufacturing wealth of England, which running, in this direction at least, in a most darkened narrow channel, gives power, *lawless and irresistible* to overwhelm and crush the land it pretends to fructify"; he continues, "Never, my dear young lady, did the avarice of man conceive a system so horribly destructive of every touch of human feeling, as that by which the low-priced agony of labourine infants is made to eke out and supply all that is wanting to enable the giant engines of our factories to out-spin all the world" (236). It is not, in other words, industry that "fructifies" the factory town, but the labor and agony extracted from the working-class body to fuel the factory machine.

The metaphor of bodily extraction in fact pervades the novel, mirroring the "traffic in the

muscles and sinews of the poor negroes" that Trollope describes in *Whitlaw*. Explaining his determination to supplant British agriculture with the factory system, Dowling proclaims,

> think how we shall suck in—that is we the capitalists, my man—think how we shall suck in gold, gold, gold, from all sides. The idea is perfectly magnificent! The fat Flemings must give up all hopes of ever getting their finical flax to vie with our cotton again!...Crockley, they don't understand spinning in Flanders: they don't know yet how many baby sinews must be dragged, and drawn out to mix as it were with the thread, before the work can be made to answer. (142)

On one level, Dowling's description animates the process of commodification Marx describes: labor must be "drawn out" or extracted in order to produce thread, which is then converted to industrial capital, or "gold." The relation between capitalist and workers' "sinews" is mediated and obscured. Looked at another way, however, Trollope's metaphor undermines the stability of this mediation—it takes little imaginative effort to move from "sinews" and "suck" to comestible bodies being fed straight to the insatiable mouths of captains of industry, like Brotherton himself, short-circuiting the stable distance between productive bodies and consumable goods. These metaphors of extraction thus recall the unmediated structures of corporeal consumption and production that mark the slave system—a point Bell highlights when he argues that, "That marvelous machinery of which we make our boast…is not more perfect in its power of drawing out the delicately attenuated thread…then the system for reducing the human labour necessary for its production to the lowest price is, for degrading the moral nature of the helpless slaves engaged in it" (237). Machinery can extract "slaves" from ordinary workers as easily as it extracts thread from the cotton those slaves ordinarily produce.

Both the factory owner and the factory machine itself, then, appear to extract labor from the body of the worker in a process that looks, in Trollope's account, strangely like a form of feeding. These images recall the scene of industrial-agrarian production depicted in Williams's and Warner's narratives, which detail the interpenetration of bodies and machines, exemplified by Williams's description of the "treadmill." They also recall, through a strange process of inversion, Juno's

mechanical maternity. The factory seems to invert and amplify the relationship between reproduction and destruction that *Whitlaw* describes; whereas in *Whitlaw*, Juno gives birth to children who are doomed to a life of physical anguish and, in Selina's case, a tragic death, in *Armstrong*, dying children are seemingly re-implanted within the womb-like, "fructified" pastures that surround the factory town.

Indeed, this process of impregnation in reverse is shadowed by the disruptions to reproduction and maternal care that the factory seems to demand. Trollope's novel deals, of course, with a protagonist who, following his adoption into the Dowling household, is separated from his mother (who will die before he frees himself) and brother, whereupon relations of kin are exchanged for the relations of domination that structure both his experience in the Dowling home and as an apprentice at Deep Valley. However, Bell also emphasizes the factory's particular power to mirror slavery in distorting lines of maternity. When Mary Brotherton protests that slavery is qualitatively different from industry because "the negro slave…is the *property* of the master" (235), Bell counters that the factory child "too is a *property*," though not of the master but of his parents, as he goes on to explain: "nor is it the least horrible part of the evil which noiselessly has grown out of this tremendous system, that the beings whom nature has ordained throughout creation to keep watch and ward over the helpless weakness of infant life, are driven by it to struggle with, and trample down…even the love of a parent for its offspring" (235). Mirroring Juno's "mechanistic" maternity, the mother of the factory child, in Bell's estimation, not only loses love for its offspring, but is also forced to turn that child into an object of property. The result is that, in Bell's estimation, the factory child resembles a peculiar figure: the "abortive creature." He explains,

> If some strange accident, preceding birth, disturbs the beautiful process by which nature prepares the noble being she has made to be lord of all, and an abortive creature comes to life, curtailed of all its fair proportions, both of mind and body, all within reach of the hapless prodigy shudder as they mourn, and the best and wisest among them pray to God that its span of life be short….the effect which the factories of this district is producing upon above two hundred thousand of its

> population, is beyond all calculation more deplorable, and many a child is born amongst them whose destiny, if fairly weighed against that of such a one as I have described, would appear incomparably more severe. (238)

If the factory draws upon the bodies of workers to "fructify" the local economy, in other words, it does so at the expense of rupturing lines of maternal care, supplanting reproduction with an abortive destruction. The result is a vision of reproduction in reverse: the machine "aborts" the living factory child, whose killing labor in turn re-impregnates the system and the "blood-stained fortune" (246) that spawned him. As Trollope notes, "It is for children, children, children that the unwearied engine calls" (238).

If Trollope suggests that the factory disrupts the putatively natural order of food production and biological reproduction, substituting both for processes of bodily violation, she does so by framing the industrial town as an extension and an intensification of the slave plantation, where human bodies in her description resemble machines and lines of maternal care and mechanical (re)production blur, siphoning off agency in favor of a deeply alienated "animatedness." The locus of the novel's disrupted order of reproduction and cultivation is, of course, Michael, who finds himself stolen, apprenticed, orphaned and then adopted, all while exposed to the vicissitudes of factory labor in the course of the novel. If Juno comes to represent the slave system writ large in her disturbingly mechanistic maternity, in other words, Michael comes to represent the factory system in his belated natal alienation.

Like Juno, moreover, Michael finds himself transformed by these broader social structures into the novel's consummate performer—one whose performances mime Juno's own. Michael spends the first volume of the novel forced to perform in the increasingly elaborate spectacles that Dowling devises. As soon as Michael enters the Dowling home, Sir Matthew insists that he put on a new suit of clothes, not to make him more comfortable, but rather to amuse the Dowlings: "Considering the loathing and disgust manifested by Sir Matthew towards the person and poverty of

his *protégé*, it was extraordinary to see the amusement he seemed to derive from dressing him up…it was his own large hands that thrust the little limbs of Michael into the clothing he chose they should wear, and it was amidst shouts of laughter from both [Dowling and a house servant], that the ludicrous metamorphosis was completed" (63). Dowling's physical manipulation of Michael's person extends further, however, when Dowling forces Michael to take part in an onstage performance dedicated to celebrating his "benevolent" adoption. The performance, "A Masque" titled "'Gratitude and Goodness,' or, 'The Romance of Dowling Lodge,'" opens with an allusion to Milton's *Comus*, and features the entire Dowling family performing a series of dances and *tableau*, styled, Trollope notes, "on occasion of a rustic *fête*" (125). The play is meant to publicize Dowling's charity, while displaying the "youthful grace and beauty" of his abundant progeny, but when Michael finally makes his appearance, his performance serves to dramatize the dynamics of terror and coercion that underwrite this putatively benevolent scene.

When Michael takes the stage, he intends to deliver a speech celebrating, in essence, his natal alienation, extolling the way in which Dowling and his family have taken the place of Michael's mother and brother: "My mother's dear, and so's my brother too, / But dearer still are your papa and you" (127). Michael, however, finds himself unable to get through the speech, and before his final lines, breaks down in vehement sobs, mirroring the "sobbing excess of emotion" that Dowling performed just moments before, in the masque's sentimental climax. As Mary Brotherton comes to realize that "That child is suffering from an agony of terror" (127), Trollope seems to instruct her readers to bear witness to the acts of theatricalized coercion and working-class sorrow that lie exposed in plain sight on the masque's stage.[88] Soon thereafter, Mary determines "to become

[88] Michael's failed performance resonates with what Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection*, describes as the "ventriloquy" of enslavement (39), explaining: "The simulation of consent in the context of extreme domination was an orchestration intent upon making the captive body speak the master's truth as well as disproving the suffering of the enslaved" (38), one which depended upon a "chasm between truth and the body" (39).

acquainted with what was happening *behind the scenes* respecting Michael Armstrong" (132)—an impulse that leads her to discover Michael being beaten offstage just moments later. The scene, in other words, encourages the novel's readers to adopt a critical stance towards not only "The Romance of the Dowling Lodge," but also towards the novel's own melodramatic mode—even as Trollope proves unwilling to dispense with that mode entirely, as Michael's anguished weeping and subsequent beating suggest. More importantly, the scene dramatizes the challenges that inhere in any attempt to discern the "true" character of the working classes from the highly visible spectacle of their bodies in pain. While the display of the body caught in scenes of suffering can be useful for revealing the alienated condition of the working-class psyche, that same body can also, Trollope suggests here, be transformed into an instrument that conceals or masks those conditions, as it is forced, instead, to play a part thrust upon it by the industrial master class. Reading that body accurately requires, in other words, remaining alert to the disjunctions between its capacities for an alien animatedness and self-proprietary expressiveness.

A few scenes later, Dowling agrees to bring Michael back to the factory to visit his brother. As they make their way there, Dowling and Crockley force Michael to walk alongside them as they ride on horseback, occasionally forcing him to jog and jump to avoid being crushed by Dowling's horse. The scene is curious, however, in the particular attention it pays to the animation and exhaustion of Michael's body—recalling the peculiar combination of agitation and hesitation that characterized Juno's performances. Trollope explains that, "though his limbs were wretchedly thin and attenuated, they had sufficient elasticity to enable him for some time to keep at now great distance…but, by degrees, his breath and strength failed, and perforce his speed relaxed into a panting, shuffling, walk" (95). Michael's movement from "elasticity" to a "panting, shuffling walk" seems fairly banal at first, but Dowling and Crockley are quick to establish that it is the very combination of "liveliness" and "laziness" that Michael embodies here that marks him as a member

of the working classes. After Dowling asks, "Don't you think I should make a good-dancing master," Crockley adds, "when one watches that pale-faced young scamp making such active caprioles…it is impossible not to see that nothing in God's world but sheer willful laziness makes those obstinate little brutes, at the factory, pretend to totter, and stumble, and faint, and the devil knows what; when all their work is to walk backwards and forwards as leisurely as if they were parading for pleasure" (96). In Crockley's estimation, the factory scene as it ought to be is where work seems synonymous with what Crockley here calls a "parading for pleasure." Yet his description of factory labor as it *is* depicts Michael and his working-class brethren in two seemingly opposed but in fact closely related states: the animated "capriole" and the tottering, stumbling *de-animation* of the body wasted from work, whose consciousness, in its fainting, slips away.

Michael, in other words, inhabits the erratic animatedness that Juno likewise embodies in *Whitlaw*. In this passage, Trollope suggests that we ought to see, in the factory child's simultaneously excessive and vanishing powers of locomotion a parallel to the machines upon which he works. Indeed, Crockley argues, "Why, what's steam?...Isn't it for the good of mankind? And how is that good to be had, if nimbleness of children is not brought to bear upon it?" (96). Michael's "elasticity," in other words, not only mirrors the steam engine—it is part of the very constitution of that engine's utility. But if Michael seems to become a part of the factory's machinery, Trollope suggests it might be because slavery haunts the factory child and the factory engine equally.

The strangely absent presence of slavery within the novel comes even more insistently to the surface in a scene just a few chapters earlier, where Crockley is once again implicated in the particular dialectic between animation (coming to life) and de-animation (losing consciousness, death) that he uses to describe Michael's body and the body of laboring children. In that earlier scene, Dowling receives a visit from Parsons, who is responsible for overseeing the Dowling factory. Nancy Stephens, a factory worker, has just died inside the factory, and Parsons arrives to discuss

with Dowling how best to mitigate their responsibility for her death. Their exchange, however, takes a surprising turn when Dowling asks Parsons to explain what happened:

> "[Dr. Crockley] *did* see Nancy Stephens, about a month ago, and all he said was, 'she do look a little pale in the gills, to be sure, but a dance would cure her, I have no doubt.' 'A dance!' says I, 'Doctor, and please to tell me,' says I, 'how the work is to get on, if the factory boys and girls sets off dancing?'
>
> 'Maybe you haven't got a fiddle?' said he.
>
> 'Maybe I haven't,' said I.
>
> 'Well then,' says he, 'if it don't suit you to let them dance to the fiddle, I'll bet ten to one you'll be after making 'em dance to *the strap*.' And with that, if you'll believe me, sir, he set of capering, and making antics, just as if there had been somebody behind a-strapping him. To be sure, it was fit to make one die of laughing to see him; but that's not the way you know, sir, to do one any good as to finding out the real condition of the people." (45)

In its juxtaposition of the animating music of the fiddle and the animating violence of the strap, the scene clearly refers to the "plantation amusements" that Hartman details at length in *Scenes of Subjection*. Those amusements, she explains, served not only to turn the enslaved body into an instrument for the entertainment of the slave master, but also underscored the way in which not just bodily pain but also bodily pleasure could become a site of contestation, in which the master made visible his dominion over the slave's will through his enjoyment of that body. By moving the scene of the plantation amusement onto the factory floor where Nancy Stephens stands on the verge of dying away, Trollope similarly underscores the intimacy between work, play, and punishment that Hartman describes and that Trollope finds in industrial as much as slave production. By suggesting that the factory floor looks not like the plantation fields but rather the slave dance, Trollope thus suggests that the factory system mimics the slave system not only in its destructive effects, but also in its capacity to alienate and instrumentalize the body of its workers so pervasively that even leisure—dancing, acting, and other forms of play—becomes a space for a domination that renders play nearly indistinguishable from pain and from a deathly "fainting away."

Though Michael seems to inhabit and re-embody the slave past in these early scenes, by the novel's end, these experiences ultimately help to re-animate Michael as the self-possessed individual

prized by Victorian liberalism, transforming his link to the slave past into an appropriative rescripting of slavery's subjections to affirm English freedom. Throughout the novel, Trollope insists upon Michael's exceptionalism, marking Michael, the subject of the novel's *bildungsroman* plot, as a character who stands apart from his factory brethren in his abilities to attain to the status of a character with a fully-developed consciousness by the novel's conclusion. Indeed, the later portions of the novel focus primarily on that *bildung*. After escaping from the factory and attempting to take his own life (by throwing himself from the verge of a sublime cliff), he is rescued, "revivified," and provided with an apprenticeship in the English countryside, at a far remove from the industrial system. Even prior to this escape, however, Trollope suggests that Michael's latent emotional capacities distinguish him from the hyperembodied, mechanistic subjects who surround him: "this generous power of living, as it were, in the prosperity of another, so strengthened the character of the boy, as perfectly to save him from that worst result of youthful suffering, a reckless, desperate despair, which by destroying hope, that beautiful mainspring of all our best actions, leaves the poor spiritless machine alive only to the wretched consciousness of its capacity for pain"—a situation that, Trollope explains, resembles only "that of slaves purchased and paid for like an ox" (325). Moreover, whereas, in *Whitlaw*, Juno's "spiritless" state ensures that she will never fully recover from her mechanical embodiment, Michael's self-consciousness quite literally repairs his deadened, machine-like body:

> When such thoughts arose, his bodily strength seemed to revive, his aching knees no longer bent under him, his gait was no longer that of an ordinary factory-child, the energy of his mind lent itself to his limbs, and wearily as he stretched himself upon his bed of straw, and long and lanky as his half-starved person grew, Michael Armstrong did not become a cripple. (326)

In Trollope's description, Michael's ability to preserve hope, and thus to preserve a self-proprietary "mainspring" that might connect the actions of the body to the intentions of the will, not only separates his consciousness from the workers around him, but changes the states of his body as well,

replacing his previous tendencies to swing uncontrollably between a lively elasticity and a deathly stumbling with a functional, well-coordinated corpus. Little surprise, then, that when Michael later passes by the factory from which he escaped, "He literally hugged himself, and blessed the freedom of his limbs, the firm and healthy action of his pulse, and the delicious consciousness that he was no man's slave" (354).

Michael's gradual development out of subjection and into a self-proprietary subjecthood, matched by an energized but no longer anxiously animated body, thus seems to suggest that Trollope's aim is to narrate a trajectory out of abjection that depends upon rejecting Michael's prior identification with the slave. Trollope's investment in the integrity of Michael's individualist agency seems to result in a particular hesitancy around socially transformative actions in the novel that stands in contrast to the scenes of upheaval that close *Whitlaw* and *The Barnabys in America*. In the "Preface" to the novel, Trollope explains that she ends the novel before Michael reaches adulthood precisely because of her disillusionment with working-class politics. Originally, she explains, she had intended the work to contain two sections; the first, which comprises the novel as it was ultimately published, would depict Michael's childhood labors. In the second, Trollope hoped that Michael, "should have been seen embarked in those perfectly constitutional struggles for the amelioration of the sufferings of his class" (3). However, because "those in whose behalf she hoped to move the sympathy of their country are found busy in scenes of outrage and lawless violence," it was impossible to proceed with the second half of the novel and, instead, "she had determined that the existence of her hero as an operative shall close with his childhood" (3-4). The novel does, however, stage a scene from a working-class political meeting, when Michael happens upon working-class agitators who meet in York to sign a petition for the Ten Hours Act. Michael agrees to join them, and briefly walks alongside the "peaceful tumult" of men walking together towards York. Rather than become swept up in the crowd, however, Michael—like the men around him—finds himself

"as silent as the rest, and trudged on without any other communion than that of his own thoughts" (362). Later that evening, Michael learns of his brother's whereabouts; the personal overtakes the political, and Michael leaves the agitators behind in search of his long-lost family.

Ultimately, however, Trollope does not abandon the possibility for collective action. Instead, that action is left to the ghosts of the child factory workers who, unlike Michael, never managed to transcend their abjected state. As Matthew Dowling lies dying in his bed, and Michael, who has returned without retribution on his mind, stands idly by, Dowling sees one final vision of radically alienated bodies—the ghostly bodies of the children killed inside the Dowling mill, animated by the desire for revenge. As delirium sets in, Sir Matthew cries out, "There's a dead body walking about the room!...One? No! – it is not one, it is five hundred!...They are all dirty, beastly factory-children. Their arms and legs are all broken and smashed and hanging by bits of skin…Their horrid joints will drop upon me! They are dangling and loose, I tell you!" (417). In his final breaths, Dowling imagines children whose bodies are animated no longer by the overseer's cruelty but by the overpowering desire for retribution—the ghostly residue of an agency stolen away by the novel's labor system. In their haunting return, however, we might find not only the phantom will of the working class, but also, perhaps, a lingering remnant of Juno's disruptive power returning in the bodies of these abandoned children, their broken bodies reproduced by the unpredictable and, in this final instance, generative, engines of the laboring machine.

Michael Armstrong is thus a narrative that returns to the scene of slavery, and its acts of monstrous human production, but that does so in order to both intensify and reverse the mechanical maternity that Juno embodies in *Whitlaw*. As these children's ghostly status suggests, however, their reanimation of the upheavals of the enslaved remains inflected by death. If the Dowling pastures, re-impregnated by the buried bodies of workers dying in the industrial town and on the factory floor, signify that a reversal of human reproduction is taking place, they mirror and

amplify the scene of human reproduction that Trollope depicts in *Whitlaw*, where giving birth is, for Juno, indistinguishable from a kind of living death as, devoid of sentience, her mechanical body lives on. In establishing this line of filiation between Juno and the ghosts of child laborers, Trollope thus establishes a "genealogy" that links industry to Britain's putatively receding slave past. That genealogy is marked not by clear lines of relation or influence, but rather by discontinuities, as both Juno and the factory children are related not by acts that sustain life, but by their shared acts of deathly reproduction. In her novels' conclusions, Trollope suggests that while British history in 1840 may seem like a rupture with all that came before, the ruptures between the slave past and the industrial present might nonetheless present an opportunity for spectral upheavals that trouble a stable social order in which slave bodies are made to recede behind the "white and beautiful free race in England" that their labor has produced.

* * *

Taken together, Frances Trollope's fiction yields a portrait of an early industrial England that "inherits" from the chattel slavery system forms of emotional deprivation tied to what she and other British writers of the period imagined as the disruption of family life under industrial capitalism. For Trollope, as for Blake, that disruption is most clearly emblematized by the palpable absence of maternal care from the worlds they describe and the distortion of paternalistic forms of benevolence into devastating scenes of misrecognition and domination. For Trollope in particular, slavery transforms motherhood into a form of mechanized production; this mechanization of motherhood returns in multiple forms in early nineteenth-century England, in the guise of the dangerous factory machine that destroys the bodies of child laborers, the havoc poverty wreaks on working-class families and the bonds of mother and child in particular, the specters of death that haunt childhood in the factory town, and finally the estranged subjectivity of factory workers who in turn share the mechanically "animated" embodiment of the mother machine. Yet as *The Barnabys in America*

suggests, the mother machine also provides a model for authorship that allows this history to be reworked as fiction. While the looming presence of slavery maternity in representations of the plantation ranging from Clay's proslavery illustration to Blake's poetry to Trollope's antislavery fiction points to the slave mother as a potential icon of maternal feeling in early nineteenth-century English culture, that maternal feeling seems always already disrupted by and lost to the violences of the chattel slavery system. Atlantic slavery comes to seem in these texts neither consigned to the past nor geographically distant, but rather more like an ancestor whose genealogical trace remains woven into the fabric of both the industrial age and the modernity that is to come. But if chattel slavery seems to occupy a parental relationship to the industrial system, it is one that represents, ultimately, the brokenness of family feeling under a capitalist modernity born out of the slave past.

Though Trollope's depictions of slavery can often seem contradictory, insensitively comedic, or even at times incoherent in their critique, they are useful for the way in which they make visible a Victorian impulse to describe and come to terms with the affective legacies of the slave past. By choosing to depict slavery directly in her fiction, and by focusing explicitly on the relationship between slavery and industrial capitalism, Trollope also produces, for all of its contradictions, one of the most explicit takes on the Slavery Question in the Victorian novel, where slaves themselves will disappear for much of the rest of the period. Trollope's fiction did not incite similarly direct portrayals of slavery in British fiction. Instead, Trollope's fiction proves most salient for its diagnosis of a cultural problem that would recur throughout British realist fiction: namely, that the "modern," industrialized world of nineteenth-century England was acutely deprived of familial care and emotional connection, and that this deprivation can be traced not to the rise of the factory or the development of nineteenth-century capitalism alone, but also, perhaps more centrally, to the legacies of the chattel slavery system in the British colonies. Trollope thus sets the stage for subsequent realist fiction in two ways: First, she establishes an affective and thematic relationship between

chattel slavery and the dissolution of traditional family bonds, a relationship that will return again and again in the figurative language of nineteenth-century fiction. Second, and more importantly, Trollope paints for readers a sweeping sense of emotional alienation and loss shared by British culture that future Victorian novelists will seek to repair in part through a nostalgia for a different form of slavery that they imagined to be more closely aligned with the pastorship and paternalism Trollope, Blake, Williams, and Warner all reject in their portrayals of slavery. Trollope's fiction thus marks the inception of a strangely recursive chronology in the development of fictional representations of slavery in the nineteenth century: writing at the end of slavery, Trollope is able to produce one of the most direct accounts of the plantation in British fiction. As the moment of emancipation began to recede into the past, writers did not so much turn away from slavery as reach further and further into fictional pasts—colonial, feudal, and ancient—to account for slavery's salience to their present moment.

As this chapter suggests, nineteenth-century writers had begun to criticize these paternalistic portrayals of slavery as soon as slavery began to enter into Victorian fiction. But it was perhaps precisely because Britons such as Trollope saw the threatened destruction of familial intimacy as bound up with chattel slavery that the later novelists who are the subjects of the following chapters returned to a fictive slave past to construct an alternative history of British social life and an alternative understanding of the Victorian present.

Chapter Two
"If Love Be Slavery, What Is Marriage?": Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* and the Afterlife of Willing Slavery

> *What is love itself but slavery?—a better slavery than loveless freedom, but slavery none the less; fetters forged out of as unsubstantial materials as you will, but binding down the soul with stronger force than ever did iron manacle of slave or convict. No living heart that loves, can sing Io paeans to freedom: unless in mockery of itself, or in the bitterness of an illusion fled. And if love be slavery, what is marriage?*
> ("Fetters," *All the Year Round*, 23 January, 1864)

> *Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one; not a slave merely, but a favourite.*
> (John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 1869)

"What is love itself but slavery?" asks an unsigned essay published in Dickens's magazine *All the Year Round* in January 1864. At first glance, the question does not appear to be particularly novel. Comparisons between slavery and marriage have been made since at least the eighteenth century and continue into the present day, though they perhaps reached their apex in the nineteenth century. Summarizing early feminist accounts of these comparisons, Kathryn Gleadle has argued that the juxtaposition of married, middle-class Victorian women and colonial slaves served as a gesture for advancing at least four distinct critiques of marriage; slaves represented women's commodification on the marriage market, their civil death once married under the laws of coverture, their vulnerability to domestic violence, and their frequent, though not total exclusion from intellectual and public cultures and, ultimately, from the domain of subjectivity itself.[89] Each of these critiques was predicated upon an assumption that slaves were practically indistinguishable from various kinds of negative objects: namely, objects of property and objects of violence. Yet the slavery invoked by the anonymous author of "Fetters" appears to present us with enslaved objects of another kind. Bound not by material chains but by unspecified "unsubstantial materials," the slaves the author alludes to here would seem to be not objects of property or of violence, but instead objects of affection.

[89] Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movements 1831-51* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 62-106.

In the chapter that follows, I ask why figures for enslavement seem to emerge when Victorian writers think about familial intimacy, particularly in contrast to what the author of "Fetters" describes as the "loveless" conditions of freedom. From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, William Blake, James Williams, Ashton Warner, and Frances Trollope made visible the ways in which the chattel slavery system sought to co-opt the kinships of the enslaved and transform them into a site for the production of mere commodity objects, stripping away the dynamics of emotional care that defined the family in the sentimental cultures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But in this chapter, I will argue that during this same period, a very different understanding of slavery was taking shape in British culture, one that aligned slavery with the emotional world of familial intimacy rather than the plantation system that sought to disrupt that world for the enslaved. In this interpretation, slavery represented not capitalist alienation and commodification, but instead a form of dependency that could seem antithetical to the culture surrounding nineteenth-century market capitalism, and therefore particularly meaningful as a symbol of social attachments that many Victorians cherished but that seemed increasingly at odds with liberal notions of possessive individualism and contractual forms of social relation. Given that the physical and emotional violence of slavery was not unknown to Victorian culture, however, writers and thinkers for whom slavery's dependencies had an emotional appeal could only embrace this interpretation by creating a conceptual distance between those dependencies and the chattel slavery system. To do so, writings that span the British courts, English philosophy, and the Victorian novel imagined a distinctive form of slavery, a willing, domestic slavery, that might stand apart from the violence and dehumanization of the chattel slavery system—but also from the freedoms that English law promised to chattel slaves and to English subjects more broadly in the nineteenth century. Writers who participated in the invention of the figure of the willing slave did so as part of a broader project to carve out the family as what Janet Halley has described as an "exceptional" space in the

law and in liberal economic culture more broadly, bolstering English coverture and preserving the family from early English feminists' calls for female independence.[90]

To show how this very different interpretation of slavery took shape in British culture, I begin by examining two domains where slavery was re-defined as a specific type of intimate dependency grounded in personal feeling: feminist discourse and slave law. Carolyn Vellenga Berman has argued that eighteenth-century sentimental culture often understood familial affection and the "attachments" of slaves to slaveholders as linked phenomena that could encourage, equally, the development of the normative European family and the amelioration of colonial slavery, rendering "slavery and colonization…central to the European project of domestication."[91] In her reading of *Paul et Virginie* (1777), for example, Berman illustrates how Saint-Pierre imagines that the Creole family is made whole by the marriage not only of white characters but also of slaves, and by the attachments of these couples to one another. These "attachments" rework the negative bonds that subsist between whites and slaves into positive attachments among benevolent whites and loyal Africans. Consequently, Berman explains, "In place of attachment by spikes and chains, the *petite société* offers up attachment by family feelings grounded in monogamous heterosexual passions."[92] Responding to this sentimental tradition, early British feminists turned to slavery to critique the pleasures of familial attachment as an experience that intensified rather than alleviated the constraints placed upon women's lives in England. Claiming that women's civil disabilities left them to become "slaves" to pleasure, the woman imagined at the center of these accounts found that attempts to exercise their will in the pursuit of sexual and emotional gratification led instead to a

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[90] See Janet Halley, "What is Family Law? A Genealogy, Part I," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 23, no. 1 (2011): 1-109.

[91] Carolyn Vellenga Berman, *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 59.

[92] Ibid., 78.

paradoxically self-willed domination in which self-enjoyment was indistinguishable from self-erasure.

While this imagined domestic slavery would seem quite different from the systematic enslavement of African subjects in the British colonies, the legal history of British slavery reveals that the alliance between familial attachment and slavery imagined within sentimental and feminist discourse both mirrored and influenced the legal regulation of colonial slavery in the decades preceding British abolition. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, legal cases concerning slavery came increasingly to rely on the imagined history, gender relations, and emotional conditions of the English marriage to define a specific form of slavery nominated as "domestic." Defining domestic slavery as a "privileged" condition in which constraint might become more desirable than freedom, these cases transformed slavery's "willing" attachments into a powerful legal fiction that feminized slavery in order to remake enslavement into an answer to feminist calls for female freedom on the one hand and the development of divorce laws outside of England on the other. No longer simply metaphors for one another, slavery and marital coverture became legally bound to one another in British case law and legal treatises. At the same time, legal writing sought to shift focus away from the legal ties that bound slaves to masters and wives to husbands, and replace those ties with the "unsubstantial materials" of social relation, temporal duration, and personal recognition that look particularly like the affections of the heart that took center stage in the family affairs of Victorian fiction. The second section of this chapter will detail this legal history, to show how British slavery cases responded to feminist complaints about the inequalities inscribed in the English marriage contract by re-framing domestic slavery as a refuge from the deprivations jurists saw as inherent to modern individualism, contractualism, and social welfare.

The second half of this chapter will turn to Charles Dickens's 1848 novel *Dombey and Son* to explore how the complex history of willing slavery and English marriage gave rise to an

"affectionate" mode in Dickens's fiction that is distinctive precisely because of the conflicted feelings it stirs for readers of the novel. In contrast to the tearful pity of sentimentality and the heightened passions of sensationalism, this affectionate mode operates in a mellower affective register, inspiring a suffusion of warmth rather than an outpouring of emotion. But for Dickens, affectionate feelings entailed a set of obligations, attachments, and dependencies that could make its warm feelings seem as burdensome as they were comforting. Though it may seem counterintuitive to associate this affective condition with enslavement, whose sentimental and sensational frames will likely be more familiar to modern readers, Dickens's novel does just that by attaching this peculiar form of affection to the life of Walter Gay, whose story throughout the novel is bound up in anachronistic references to the slavery colonies, as he moves first from the comforts of his Uncle Sol's shipmaker's shop, to off-stage adventures bound for the West Indies onboard the "Son and Heir," before concluding the novel firmly ensconced within the "house of bondage" he shares with Florence Dombey. Contrasting Edith Dombey's sensational story of mercenary marriage, psychological torment, fugitive escape, and broken will to the nostalgic and at times melancholic affections shared by Uncle Sol, Walter, and Florence, Dickens offers an alternative affective history of family and slavery more familiar from the stories of willing slavery that will be the focus of the first half of this chapter. But while we may be tempted to read Dickens's take on the old world of New World slavery in the Walter plot as offering a respite from the contradictions of marriage's "social contract" that Edith's plot dramatizes, I argue instead that we might read Dickens as memorializing a history of slavery and family that he, at the same time, knows he must erase in order to make marriage work in his first major foray into realist, domestic fiction.[93]

[93] For Nancy Bentley, the relationship between love and slavery in American fiction entails a similar dynamic of erasure, as she argues that Engels's intervention is to make visible the way in which the connection between marriage and slavery has been erased in the nineteenth century. At the same time, Bentley also argues that slavery could participate in a more radical act of erasure. Bentley explains that the resemblances between slavery and marriage ultimately underscored marriage's self-

In doing so, Dickens dramatizes the peculiarities of marriage as an institution that is enmeshed in the contradictory logic of slavery and emancipation, domestic privacy and attachments to the social contract of liberalism that domestic slavery cases put on display, returning to slavery as a legal precedent and emotional precursor to marriage. While such an account requires elucidating a nostalgia for slavery in the novel that works against the assumption that *Dombey and Son* offers a critique of imperialism, this account yields a more accurate and, I think, more interesting model for the novel's own relationship to colonial history. Replacing models of conjunction and substitution across space for a model that prioritizes acts of remembering and forgetting across time, I argue that *Dombey and Son* demands not only that we think anew about the novel's historical context to make sense of its treatment of slavery, but also that we consider other models than those offered by historicist treatments of colonialism in Dickens's fiction in order to notice the ways in which memories are conjured, revised, and forgotten by the marriage contract and the marriage plot in Dickens's realist novel.

"Better to be a slave and be kissed, than to be a slave without kissing": Intimacy, Slavery, and the Condition of Women in England

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, political theorists, anthropologists, legal historians, and early feminists sought to describe and differentiate an older social order governed by status hierarchies, consanguineal kinships, and familial alliances from the modern world of contract, conjugal romance, and liberal statehood—a transition Henry Sumner Maine famously described in

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sacrifices; yet in demanding that the individual give up his freedom, these sacrifices also held the potential for "radical" underpinnings. Thus, while "the institution resemble[d] a form of bondage as much as the freedom of contract," that bondage was potentially linked to "utopia" insofar as it "effectively abolished the world that is" in order to "make way for a new existential order" ("The Strange Career of Love and Slavery: Chesnutt, Engels, Masoch," *American Literary History* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 481). Dickens's embrace and then forgetting of domestic slavery's history in some ways echoes both of the forms of erasure Bentley describes, as he imagines that this narrative can provide an answer to the problems inherent to contractualism by leading to the creation of a of utopian domesticity freed from slavery's possessive form—but that in doing so, begins to erase the slave past from view.

his 1860 study *Ancient Law* as the shift "*from Status to Contract*."[94] For Maine, modernity was defined by consensually-contracted relations between autonomous and equal individuals, mediated by the state—relations that extended all the way to the family. Thus, while liberal contractualism reshaped the nature of politics and economics, the transition between these two social orders was also registered in the changing structure of marriage. As Ruth Perry argues, the eighteenth century witnessed a shift "from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple. That is, the biologically given family into which one was born was gradually becoming secondary to the chosen family constructed by marriage."[95] This shift was underwritten in the law by the passage of the 1753 Hardwicke Marriage Act, which for the first time promised to fully formalize and regulate marriage as a legal institution, but part of the force of this shift was also to be found in the uniquely fictional quality of the conjugal plot, which bound individuals to one another in "fictive kinships" founded upon subjective qualities like complementarity and personal affection that took the place of biologically-determined notions of affinity and desire.

However, both nineteenth-century and modern theorists have contested the notion that the legalization of marriage and the rise of emotional over consanguineal ties brought with it the equity that contractualism seems to promise. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that as societies once organized around "alliance" gave way to a society in which subjects were instead defined by "sexuality," pleasure replaced hereditary kinship as the primary vector of social power, though the techniques that defined that power were newly "mobile, polymorphous, and

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[94] Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 165.

[95] Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

contingent."[96] Eighteenth and nineteenth-century feminists likewise turned to the pleasures of sexuality and familial intimacy to interrogate the ways in which newer discourses of romance and female sexuality in fact extended rather than disrupted outmoded systems of kinship alliance, under which marriage operated primarily as a consolidation of patriarchal power rather than as an expression of conjugal choice. As we will see, interpretations of the relationship between historical forms of kinship, modern sexuality, female agency, and the shift from status to contract would take many different forms throughout this period.[97] But these interpretations typically shared an impulse to turn to slavery as a central trope around which this constellation of terms might be organized and re-negotiated at different moments throughout the period.

In 1884, Friedrich Engels would argue in *The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State*, that "the modern individual family is founded upon the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife."[98] For Engels, domestic slavery encapsulates the development of the family into a component of the liberal state, in which the marriage contract serves as an instrument of coercion and the business of care becomes another avenue for the exploitation of labor. As Nancy Bentley explains in her essay "The Strange Career of Love and Slavery," "Marriage gives away what is illiberal about liberal contract theory," revealing the kinship between slavery and heterosexual norms under modern contractualism.[99] Under these conditions, Bentley explains, Engels' utopia is one where marriage gives way to relations formed through the pleasures of "mutual inclination" and "unconstrained

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[96] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 106.

[97] For a discussion of nineteenth-century debates about contractual marriage, and the relationship of those debates to Victorian feminism, see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 212-17.

[98] Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 105.

[99] Bentley, "The Strange Career of Love and Slavery," 481.

sexual intercourse" rather than contractual agreements.[100] By contrast, earlier English feminists offered an account of "domestic slavery" that inverted some of Engels's central premises, as they claimed domestic slavery as a symbol for the emotional *excesses* of modern sexuality, whose antidote might be found in liberalism's disinterested contractualism. This section will follow these earlier accounts, to show how early feminists marshaled metaphors of slavery in order to show how the pleasures of familial attachments and modern romance threatened to disorder the relationship between subjection and free will and to challenge the notion that sexual desire or intimate feelings could serve as a reliable marker of interest or choice—the terms of individualistic subjectivity towards which these early feminist texts aspired. For women operating within a system that accorded them little agency outside of the sphere of the family, these feminists argued, the pleasures of family romance and sexual choice could ultimately come to seem indistinguishable from a form of self-willed "slavery," as they were asked to consent to their own marital subjection.

Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* provides a striking example of the sentimental dynamics Berman describes, in which writers tended to view slavery within a framework of personal attachment rather than violent domination. Wollstonecraft draws on this sentimental trope, however, in order to critique the ways in which those attachments can themselves be co-opted for more paradoxical forms of female subjection. For Wollstonecraft, monarchical political orders, gender hierarchies, and colonial slavery are linked by their reduction of subjects to a corporeal politics that aligns blood, beauty, and racialized labor as different measures of virtue or status. Within this framework, subjection and sovereignty blur as enslavement comes to seem synonymous with the paradoxes of female embodiment, which binds women to their abject position within gender hierarchies while at the same time granting them the (highly circumscribed) power of sexual attraction:

[100] Ibid., 476.

> Satiety has a very different effect, and I have often been forcibly struck by an emphatical description of damnation; when the spirit is represented as continually hovering with abortive eagerness round the defiled body, unable to enjoy anything without the organs of sense. Yet, to their senses, are women made slaves, because it is by their sensibility that they obtain present power.[101]

For Wollstonecraft, in other words, slavery comes to seem synonymous with the retrograde bodily politics associated with an older social order based in various measures of corporeal meaning and power. Ultimately, however, Wollstonecraft argues that slavery's risks lie not only in its reduction of the female subject to a bodily mode of virtue, but also in the excessive emotional and romantic attachments formed between slaves and their paternal masters. "Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion," Wollstonecraft writes, "their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect…Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature" (122). While Wollstonecraft appears to critique female servility, it is a servility marked not by violence or exploitation but by effusive sentiments, as women, consumed by love, learn to wield the tyrannical power of emotion rather than earn the equality that comes of respect. Differentiating between friendship and the inequities central to romantic love, Wollstonecraft posits that the latter resembles not only a mode of decadence or corruption, but the more specific position of the figurative slave, for whom domination had come increasingly to be defined by the binding force of personal emotion.

In Wollstonecraft's text, the affiliation between slavery and the excessive emotionalism of modern sexuality becomes a way of naming a problem posed by family romance, with its emphasis upon intensely intimate and personal modes of value and relation, for women hoping to move beyond the circumscribed forms of protection and power offered them within the domestic sphere. As Wollstonecraft points out, such feelings become self-perpetuating, as women who are bound to

[101] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 154. Hereafter cited in text.

please find themselves bound to pleasure in return: "The mighty business of female life is to please, and restrained from entering into more important concerns by political and civil oppression, sentiments become events, and reflection deepens what it should, and would have effaced, if the understanding had been allowed to take a wider range" (229). Wollstonecraft underscores sentiment's peculiar quality as at once illusory or fictive (an "event" in the imagination only) *and* powerfully constraining.

By denaturalizing both women's duty to please and the pleasures of sentiment they receive in return, Wollstonecraft thus exposes romantic feeling's fictionality, and its usefulness as a tactic for turning bondage into a form of pleasure for women as much as for the patriarchs who bind them to this affective sphere. In one sense, then, Wollstonecraft acknowledges the fictional nature of a pleasurable slavery—and its relationship to the genres of fiction in which "sentiments become events." At the same time, however, Wollstonecraft stops short of directing her critique towards the system of slavery from which her discussions of pleasurable slavery are drawn and the association between slavery and pleasure it scripts, choosing instead to direct her attention towards the question of how English women might escape from the bonds of pleasure and in doing so leave behind their association with colonial slaves.

By contrast, Thompson and Wheeler's 1825 *Appeal of One-Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretentions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery*, establishes a more direct connections between New World slavery and the plight of English women, but Thompson and Wheeler do so not to critique slavery but instead to complicate their philosophical account of the nature of female sexuality and its relationship to female individualism at home in England. Thompson echoes Wollstonecraft in arguing that the problem of female oppression can be defined fundamentally as a problem of the relationship between pleasure and consent or the voluntariness of the will. At the same time, this distinction becomes explicitly, if

confusedly, racialized in Thompson's analysis. For Thompson, consent comes to be defined as a problem of whiteness, while black (and specifically West Indian) slaves occupy contradictory positions, representing at some moments the evacuation of consent and, at others, the embodiment of a form of attachment in which pleasure and consent harmonize, giving rise to the "improving" pleasures of rational self-governance. On the one hand, Thompson argues that slavery represents the paradigmatic form of a coercive contract:

> A contract, giving all power, arbitrary will and unbridled enjoyment to the one side; to the other, unqualified obedience, and enjoyments meted out or withheld at the caprice of the ruling and enjoying party. Such a contract, as the owners of *slaves* in the West Indies and every other slave-polluted soil, enter into with their slaves—the law of the stronger imposed on the weaker, *in contempt* of the interests and wishes of the weaker.[102]

For Thompson, writing within a utilitarian tradition, the crime of the marriage contract, like the slavery contract, is that it denies rather than facilitates the pursuit of the interests, wishes, and enjoyments of the weak in order to provide an excess of enjoyment to the strong.

Yet despite arguing that such arrangements grant to married men and slaveholders alike the ability to distribute the "pains and privations" of the contractual relation to women and slaves, respectively, Thompson ultimately suggests that the significance of his investigation—and of the analogy between slavery and marriage more specifically—might be the delineation of different forms of pleasure enjoyed by wives and slaves. Hoping to give lie to the notion that it is "Better to be a slave and be kissed, than to be a slave without kissing," Thompson sets out to examine the extent to which pleasure itself becomes a kind of harm within the English marriage (42). Thompson repeatedly suggests that the marriage system creates conditions in which "*Woman is more the slave of man for the gratification of her desires, than man is of woman*" (61). Excluded from any activity beyond the sensual sphere of romance, yet barred from premarital sex, women find that their desire is stoked

[102] William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (London: Virago, 1983), 56. Hereafter cited in text.

the better to hold them in thrall to the sphere of marriage that holds the only potential for their gratification. By terming this situation a type of "slavery," however, Thompson paradoxically equates slavery with female pleasure on the one hand and female agency on the other. Women's "enslavement" becomes a rational choice, under the circumstances, because it promises the fulfillment of pleasure that chastity withholds. Put another way, pleasure troubles distinctions between slavery and agency. While Thompson's utilitarian leanings seem to point him towards a mode of critique in which pleasure stands in for and defines notions of agency such as choice or self-interest, once he turns his attention to the pleasure of sexual desire, romance, and affection, these associations are not just inverted but thoroughly undone, so that the gratification of desire can seem a rational choice, but a choice in favor of willful self-enslavement. While pleasure provides a useful index for self and social interest, the marriage system reshapes and constrains pleasure so as to render it an unreliable marker of social good or individual benefit.

By contrast, when Thompson turns to the West Indian slave plantation, he posits that slavery's abjections paradoxically allow women held in bondage to enjoy freer forms of romantic attachment and intimate pleasures unavailable to English wives. Once again, focusing on female pleasure upends conventional dichotomies between slavery and agency, but here it serves to remake slavery itself into a form of sexual freedom:

> Amongst slaves, one common stock, that of the master, supporting, however miserably yet equably, the whole population, women, children, and men, the female slaves have not been under the necessity of submitting to a second state of individual domestic slavery to the male slaves, for the privilege of sharing unequally with them the means of a wretched existence, to vow obedience to all the despotic commands of a male slave, to resign her privileges, such as the task master leaves to all, of going out and coming in, of moving from place to place within the desolate sphere of common bonds, of forming acquaintance, friendship, and attachment, at her pleasure, with any individuals of her fellow-slaves, just as the males form their acquaintances, friendships, and attachments amongst their fellow-slaves, and particularly, that most inestimable privilege of all, the basis of all improvement, morality, and happiness—of moulding her own actions according to her own views of interest, propriety, and justice, liable to the same physical, legal, and arbitrary restraints with her male companion in slavery, and no more. To none of these evils

> of individual domestic despotism, peculiar and superadded to the common evils of slavery, is the female slave in the West Indies subjected. (82-3)

The specificity with which Thompson describes female slaves not only as free agents, but as rational actors, whose freedom of attachment to others provides her freedom over herself, serves to suggest that his thorough misreading of the slave as both self-interested and self-enjoying has little to do with familiar racial stereotypes of lasciviousness. Rather, it seems that once pleasure becomes capable of detaching or disordering the relationship between slavery and agency, it becomes possible to imagine the existence of a *pleasurable slavery* as much as a *slavery to pleasure*. Though these categories are clearly distinct, we can see how they become mutually-reinforcing within Thompson's text, such that the imagination of a colonial slavery rooted in pleasure becomes the ground for a critique of pleasure as a technique of (female) enslavement in England. While Thompson distinguishes between the improving pleasures found on a slave plantation that borders on principles of free love, and the degrading pleasures of conjugal romance, his suggestion that the slave plantation might provide a model for a more flexible model of attachment ultimately posits a relationship between "slavery" and what Bentley argues would become a goal for figures like Engels in the nineteenth century: a romance founded upon elective affinities and sexual choice.

Thompson effectively adopts the counterintuitive relationship between romantic attachment, female agency, and slavery that Wollstonecraft establishes as a model for thinking about the oppression of English women, and attempts to extend that model back to the West Indian slave plantation. In doing so, Thompson perversely seeks to re-frame the disrupted kinships of the enslaved as a form of equitable—but not legally binding—social relation that paves the way for female sexual agency. In contrast to writers such as Frances Trollope, who critiqued these disrupted kinships for the sexual and emotional violence against enslaved women they sanctioned, Thompson's critique of the heterosexual family at home in England leads him to imagine the slave

plantation as a utopian space where conflicts between female desire and female agency might finally be resolved.

In reality, the nineteenth-century slavery plantation was, of course, a site of sexual violence rather than sexual freedom. By reframing that violence as a form of female empowerment, Thompson largely reproduces what Saidiya Hartman has shown to be a common trope of proslavery rhetoric, in which women's sexual violation was recast as a seduction narrative in which they putatively exercised agency and even power in relation to male slaveholders.[103] In doing so, Thompson also sets the stage for conservative thinkers who would return to this logic in order to reimagine the slave plantation as a different kind of idealized intimate space—one defined not by radical female independence, but instead by a radical female dependency that might pose its own response to feminist complaints that the modern family form threatened to make them "willing slaves." While Thompson was at work imagining that the slavery system might eradicate the "individual domestic slavery" of attached women, nineteenth-century jurists were developing a legal form of "domestic slavery" in which the bonds of marriage and the bondages of slavery might be drawn together in a seamless legal union. By turning to this legal history, we can begin to see how slavery legislation re-constituted the terms of the debate about agency, slavery, and familial intimacy that traveled from the sentimental culture Berman describes to the early feminism of Wollstonecraft and Thompson, to re-make slavery into a refuge from white, English feminists' protests. We can also come to see how the metaphorical relationship between colonial slavery and English marriage found in these earlier examples became concretized and complicated as slavery and marriage became legally bound to one another in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Domestic Slaves: Slavery, Marriage, and British Law in the Early Nineteenth Century

In 1838, William Burge set out to "bring together those several systems of Colonial and

[103] See Hartman, "Seduction and the Ruses of Power," *Scenes of Subjection*, 79-112.

Foreign Jurisprudence" frequently confronted by the legal system responsible for administering justice within the British empire, in order to offer a systematic account of how judgments should be made when foreign laws came into conflict with the laws of England.[104] In doing so, Burge, who served for twelve years as the Attorney General to Jamaica, responded to the demands placed upon the courts by a globalizing British citizenry, whose movements raised vexing questions about the extent to which the local laws that govern persons and property might "accompan[y] a man every where," or stop short at the borders of the colony or the nation (126). The result, a four volume treatise titled *Commentaries on Colonial and Foreign Laws Generally and In Their Conflict with Each Other and with the Law of England*, "was hailed as the main work on comparative law, both on the Continent and in the United States" in the mid-nineteenth century.[105] If the need for Burge's *Commentaries* arose out of the expansion of a colonial empire fueled by violent conquest and rapacious trade, it may come as a surprise to discover that the first volume of the work is devoted mainly to a consideration not of the laws governing military action or international finance, but rather those governing questions of "personal status," which includes the status of aliens and slaves, but also the legitimation of children, marriage, and divorce—a field we might today describe as family law.[106]

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[104] William Burge, *Commentaries on Colonial and Foreign Laws Generally, and In Their Conflict with Each Other and with the Law of England*, Volume 1 (London: Saunders and Benning, Law Booksellers, 1838): i. Hereafter cited in text.

[105] Walther Hug, "The History of Comparative Law," *Harvard Law Review* 45, no. 6 (April 1932): 1064-5.

[106] In her essay "An Impossible Marriage: Slave Law and Family Law," (*Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 5, no. 2 (July 1987): 187-224), Margaret Burnham has traced the development of family law—which "sought to give new definition to family life" in relation to southern slave law in America (188-9). Burnham focuses on the differential treatment of slave families in American law, underscoring challenges slaves' chattel condition posed for family laws that sought to regulate the behavior of civil subjects. Her essay provides an important context for my own investigation into the ways in which slave law likewise helped shape and regulate the development of family laws governing English (and Scottish) subjects in the nineteenth century, suggesting that legal regulations governing slave and free families, while different, were mutually constituted. If the legal regulation of slaves required legislators to grapple with family law, in other words, so too did English family law

The opening of the first volume of Burge's *Commentaries* is devoted to a discussion of cases in which the civil status of individuals is thrown into uncertainty because the acts that determine status—birth and marriage—implicate more than one nation or territory. Of particular concern to Burge are the laws governing marriage and divorce, which are complicated by marriage's dual standing as both a contract freely made between individuals and a civil status conferred upon individuals by the law. Perhaps even more than early English feminists, Burge openly recognizes marriage's paradoxical standing, which he uses as a departure for a discussion of the shifting legal terrain under which marriage and married individuals fall. While the validity of the marriage contract must be determined according to the *lex loci contractus*, or the laws governing contracts in the state where the marriage was performed, thereafter the law that "governs their conduct or regulates their rights and obligations" is determined by the couple's "domicile," or the nation, colony, or state in which they live (681). Though England will recognize marriages contracted abroad, in other words, the relation that married individuals bear to one another is always a question of national law. When Burge attempts to justify this policy, however, his text takes an unexpected turn. Questions concerning the "conditions, rights, duties, and obligations" of married parties, he argues, are "questions, not of contract, but of status, and ought to be determined by that law which would be applied to the decision of other questions of status" (682). What are these other "questions of status?" The case of slaves brought to England:

> The decisions in the negro *Sommersett's* case and *Knight v. Wedderburn*, that a slave of the British Colonies, on his arrival in any part of the United Kingdom, became immediately free, proceeded on the principle, that the *status* became no longer subject to the law of the country in which it was constituted, when the party ceased to be domiciled in that country, but subject to the law of the country in which he had arrived. They were not, and could not be founded on the abstract principle that

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seemingly needed to draw on slavery law in order to define itself as a field in the nineteenth century. For further discussion of the intersections between marriage, slavery, and the law in America, see: Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), and Katherine M. Franke, "Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages" *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 11 (1999): 251-309.

> slavery was universally illegal, and therefore, that no law under which it existed could be recognized in an English court, because the same law which said that slavery was unlawful, and *could not exist in England*, "that its air was too pure for slavery to breathe in," that "the moment the slave put his foot on the shores of England he became free," also said, "that slavery did and *could exist in her colonies,*" and the daily decisions of her courts recognised it as a subject of property. In the conflict between the law of England and that of her colonies, the jurisprudence of England and Scotland, whilst it recognized the colonial law on questions of contract and property, rejected it in the question of status and adopted the law of England, because it had become the slave's domicile. Upon this principle also, the status of slavery which had ceased whilst the person remained in England, was held to revive when he returned to the colony. (*a*)
>
> (*a*) Slave Grace, Hagg. Rep. Williams v. Brown, 3 Bos. and Pul. 69. See the argument of Mr. Hargrave in the negro Sommersett's case, 20 St. Trials. (682)[107]

Broadly speaking, Burge asserts that the laws governing slavery provide the most apt model for determining and regulating marital relations in nineteenth-century England because slavery and marriage contracts represent a uniquely hybrid legal form, as contracts that perform the work of conferring status designations upon the subjects those contracts implicate. Just as England agreed to recognize contracts concerning the transaction of slave property in the colonies, so too would English courts recognize marital contracts forged abroad. Once the parties to the contract came to England, however, the substance of their relationships would fall under English law, which differed from foreign laws both in the rigidity with which it enforced coverture, or the civil disability of married women, and in its insistence upon the indissolubility of the marriage contract. Slave law thus offers a potential precedent for marriage cases and a legal form upon which marriage can be modeled, replacing the chaos of romantic relationships that stretch around the globe with the uniformity of binary status designations: married or unmarried, free or enslaved. Burge's text

[107] Burge appears to have been among the first legal commentators to draw these connections, but not the only one. Leonard Shelford cites the cases of *Somerset* and *Slave Grace* in his discussion of conflicts between marriage and divorce laws across state borders (and between England and Scotland in particular). See: Shelford, *A Practical Treatise of the Law of Marriage and Divorce* (Philadelphia: John S. Littell, 1841), Google Books e-book, 461. The passage from Burge's *Commentaries* I have included here is also quoted in Joel Prentiss Bishop's *Commentaries on the Law of Marriage and Divorce*, Volume Two (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1864), 118-123.

suggests not that slavery and marriage bear a necessary resemblance to one another, but rather that jurists and their interlocutors in the early nineteenth century at times turned the defunct corpus of slave law into the skeletal backbone of the Victorian marriage.

On a more granular level, however, the comparison that Burge crafts actually runs counter to the commonplace that marriage and slavery resemble one another as modes of domination or exploitation. Instead, Burge argues that the laws by which the strictures of Victorian marriage (coverture as well as the refusal to grant divorce) come to define marriages domiciled in England are the same laws that once determined that all slaves brought to England were to become free. Burge begins by citing two landmark decisions, *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) and *Knight v. Wedderburn* (1778), which determined that slaves who came to England and Scotland respectively could not be forcibly returned to slavery in the colonies. As historians of British abolition among others have argued, the British public spent much of the late eighteenth century invoking these cases, and *Somerset* in particular, as evidence that England conferred freedom upon any slaves who ventured there.[108] By turning to these cases as a model for determining the status of married men and women in England, then, Burge seems implicitly to align the law's power to bind married couples together with its power to emancipate the enslaved. The *Commentaries* thus offer a striking example of what many writers would go on to diagnose as the paradoxical nature of a Victorian state that could endorse the abolition of slavery and yet fail to recognize the constraints that English marriage and divorce policy placed on its citizens.

More importantly, though, the comparison that Burge draws here between slave law and marriage law was already operative in the slavery cases, from *Somerset* to *Slave Grace*, that Burge cites.

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[108] See F. O. Shyllon's *Black Slaves in Britain* (New York: The Institute of Race Relations for Oxford University Press, 1974), Douglas Lorimer's "Black Slaves and English Liberty: A Re-examination of Racial Slavery in England" (*Immigrants & Minorities* 3, no. 2 (July 1984): 121-50), Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), and Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free*.

In what follows, I turn to the same canon of case law that Burge cites, but in order to tell a different kind of story, one about the ways in which slavery's constraints draw on and model attachments (both between individuals and to the state) that re-secure their status as binding social relations, albeit under the guise of personal feeling rather than the bodily constraints of biology on the one hand and violence on the other. The slavery cases that Burge cites represent two important instances from a set of slavery rulings that stretch from the *Somersett* decision in 1772 to decisions reached in the early decades of the nineteenth century concerning the legitimacy of slavery following the abolition of the trade in 1807.[109] Many of the cases focus on rules governing the inheritance of slave property, slaves' capacity to enter contracts, and the jurisdiction governing slaves' status at sea and across state borders. A few, however, were also strikingly, and significantly, concerned with defining and, over time, delimiting the meaning of the term "domestic" and the character of domestic relations as those terms apply to slavery. These cases reveal that the term "domestic slavery" gained a particular legal or regulative force in the context of the British Atlantic in the decades following the abolition of the slave trade, allowing this particular form of enslavement to take on an exceptional status that exempted it from the rules governing the British-led ban on the trade. As the term

[109] *Somerset v. Stewart* and *The Case of Slave Grace* occupy a prominent place in legal histories of British abolition, most notably in Shyllon and Wong. Wong in particular isolates these cases as perhaps the most important of a body of "freedom suits" pursued by slaves in Britain during the abolition period. For Wong, female freedom suits in particular demonstrate the complex ways in which kinship and subjection intersect in the history of slavery, as kinship was used, alternately, to secure the return of slaves who travelled abroad or across state lines with their masters, and to nullify the liberation that came from fugitive escape or legal victory. "Liberty," Wong writes, "was…contingent on separation and loss" as "slaves who sought legal freedom from northern courts faced the forfeiture of home and kinship" (17-8). Building both on Wong's archive and upon her discussions of domesticity and the freedom suit in British culture, I similarly turn to both *Somerset* and *Slave Grace* to reconsider the relationship between slavery and kinship in this period. But in contrast to Wong, I explore the ways in which these cases were also understood in relation to the marriage laws that governed white, English subjects; as a result, I argue that the notions of slaves' dependency and kinship ties that were, in Wong's description, defined within these cases also extended beyond the enslaved subjects at their center to the English family, whose own marriages were redefined in relation to these slavery suits.

"domestic slavery" took on an increasingly narrower set of meanings, it also became increasingly useful as a means of defining a gendered form of slavery that we might recognize by its *unheimlich* quality: as much at home as out of place in a Victorian empire.[110]

In 1769, Charles Stewart sailed with James Somerset, a slave, from America to England, where Somerset was "to attend and serve him [Stewart] during his stay."[111] In 1771, Somerset fled; he was seized approximately two months later by Stewart, who sent Somerset to a ship bound for Jamaica, where he was to be sold. Friends of Somerset filed protests on his behalf.[112] The case that followed would become perhaps the most significant slavery case in British history, as Mansfield eventually ruled that "No master ever was allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad because he deserted from his service, or for any other reason whatever," significantly impeding if not ending the practice of holding slaves on English soil.[113] More importantly for the purposes of

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[110] Historians of slavery disagree about the prevalence of domestic slavery practiced on English soil and inside English homes following the *Somerset* decision. While Shyllon argues that the importation and exportation of domestic slaves into and out of England continued until 1834, Lorimer argues that the resistance of slaves in England following the *Somerset* decision caused the practice to disappear almost entirely from the late eighteenth century onwards. By turning from "a legal history of slave cases" to "a social history of the slaves" (122), Lorimer writes, it is possible to argue that "slavery came to an end in England between the 1760s and the 1790s, not from the Somerset Case in 1772, nor from the Act of Parliament in 1833, but from the escape of the slaves themselves." My intention in this section is not to challenge the social history Lorimer puts forward, but rather to return to the law as a space where slavery became subject to the vicissitudes of gendered projection precisely as slavery became increasingly tenuous in practice in England and in the colonies. In addition, underlying this section are questions about what aims are served by idealizing the fugitive self-liberation of men in both Victorian law and social histories of the period.

[111] Quoted in Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain*, 83.

[112] Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain*, 77.

[113] Quoted in Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free*, 30. While the decision was lauded by antislavery activists as determining that no slave could breath English air or set foot on English soil without being made free, historians have demonstrated that the emancipatory effects of the *Somerset* decision were practical rather than legally binding; the decision did not confer freedom upon slaves in England, but it made slavery so difficult to enforce that historians such as Lorimer have argued that it effectively ended the practice of slavery in England, by enabling those slaves who remained to escape without risk of recapture.

this chapter, the arguments published following the *Somerset* case offer a definition of "domestic slavery" that departs in some significant ways from its more familiar use as a term for describing the subjection of women inside the household.

Throughout the *Somerset* arguments, it becomes clear that the term "domestic slavery" refers to the practice of Atlantic slavery in general: all slaves held by private citizens, including those who work on privately-owned plantations, are considered "domestic slaves." In his influential arguments on behalf of Somerset, revised for publication, Hargrave describes "domestic slavery" as a relation formed between private citizens that most closely resembles the feudal practice of villeinage, placing domestic slavery within a recognizable history of bondage drawn from the ancient past:

> Domestic slavery, the object of the present consideration is now submitted to observation in the ensuing account, its first commencement, progress, and gradual decrease: It took origin very early among the barbarous nations…was propagated by the last over the numerous and extensive countries they subdued….its decay extended over *Europe* in the 4th; was pretty well perfected in the beginning of the 16th century. Soon after that period, the discovery of *America* revived those tyrannic doctrines of servitude, with their wretched consequences. There is now at last an attempt, and the first yet known, to introduce it into *England*; long and uninterrupted usage from the origin of the common law, stands to oppose its revival. All kinds of domestic slavery were prohibited, except villeinage. The villain was bound indeed to perpetual service; liable to the arbitrary disposal of his lord….A new species [of villeinage] has never arisen till now; for had it, remedies and powers there would have been at law: Therefore the most violent presumption against is the silence of the laws, were there nothing more. 'Tis very doubtful whether the laws of *England* will permit a man to bind himself by contract to serve for life: Certainly will not suffer him to invest another man with despotism, nor prevent his own right to dispose of property. If disallowed by consent of parties, much more when by force; if made void when commenced here, much more when imported. (3)

Hargrave describes domestic slavery as a practice that was both invented and rendered extinct in the premodern world, only to return with the colonization of the Americas. What these social forms share in common is that they bind one individual to another for life, investing a private citizen with the power to govern over another and to withhold another's right to own property. These bonds noticeably resemble the form of the marriage contract: they grant one person governance over another; they abrogate one person's right to own property by transferring that right to another; and

they obtain for life. At the same time, Hargrave distinguishes "domestic slavery" from two other, political forms of slavery that have survived in the modern world: monarchical despotism and the state's punishment of crimes.[114] The term "domestic slavery" thus comes to define a particular social relation: a form of domination that is private because its ends are imagined to be economic rather than political and intimate because it bonds individuals to particular persons rather than to the state and its figureheads, but that, as a "revival" of an ancient form of social relation, evokes the image not of the modern English wife but instead of the feudal serf.

But while Hargrave compares domestic slavery to villeinage, he is also careful to distinguish this modern form of bondage from the kinship bonds around which villeinage was organized. For Hargrave, the modern slave ought, ultimately, to be distinguished from the feudal villein because the villein, in contrast to the slave, finds himself enslaved through familial and hereditary connections, as "the kind of evidence, which the law required to prove villeinage, and allowed in disproof of it, is only applicable to a slavery in blood and family, one uninterruptedly transmitted through a long line

[114] "Great confusion has ensued," Hargrave argues, "from discoursing on slavery, without due attention to the difference between the despotism of a sovereign over a whole people and that of one subject over another. The former is foreign to the present case; and therefore when I am describing slavery, or observing upon it, I desire to be understood as confining myself to the latter; though from the connection between the two subjects, some of my observations may be applicable to both." He later argues that "In respect to slavery used for the punishment of crimes against civil society, it is founded on the same necessity, as the right of inflicting other punishments; never extends to the offender's issue; and seldom is permitted to be domestic, the objects of it being generally employed in public works, as the galley-slaves are in France. Consequently this kind of slavery is not liable to the principle objections, which occur against slavery in general" (30-1). Burnham similarly argues that in the American South, the term "domestic slavery" "was coined to distinguish 'political slavery' (the relationship between the colonists and England) and 'civil slavery' (suffered by free Blacks denied civil rights) from the perpetual nature of African slavery in the South." "By 'domestic," Burnham continues, "observers meant that slavery had placed master and slave within the same domestic sphere. Each lived in close proximity. The nature of the domestic domain of the slave was determined by the master, and the slave's fate was buffeted by both the economic and domestic fortunes on the master" (Burnham, "An Impossible Marriage," 191-2).

of ancestors to the person against whom it was alleged."[115] Lifelong personal bondage can only be legitimated, according to Hargrave, by kinships whose "commencement" stretches "beyond the time of memory" (48). All other forms of enslavement, including African slavery, are alien to and therefore illegal within England. Though domestic slavery revivified the memory of villeinage, in other words, it was fundamentally different from the kinship-based servitudes of the feudal era. In contrast to villeins, whose bondage was inseparable from the bonds of family, memory, custom, and heredity, domestic slaves, in Hargrave's description, could only be bound to servitude either by conquests or contracts newly established in the modern era.[116]

By contrast, Stewart's attorneys explicitly turned to marriage as a model for the slave-slaveholder relation. But they, too, distinguished between "natural" kinships and social bonds shaped by modern law. Mr. Alleyne, a lawyer representing Somerset, argued that slavery "is not natural, it is a municipal relation," and therefore that slavery's claims ceased once Stewart and Somerset left the municipality in which Somerset's slavery was first contracted. In his response, Dunning, a lawyer representing Stewart, does not deny slavery's "municipal" character, but instead suggests that this character, in the case of slavery as in the case of marriage, is what makes these bonds particularly durable:

> A distinction endeavoured to be established between natural and municipal relations; but the natural relations are not those only which attend the person of the man, political do so too; with which the municipal are most closely connected: Municipal

[115] *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783, with notes and illustrations*, *Volume 20*, compiled by T. B. Howell, Esq. (London: T. C. Hansard, 1816), 43. Hereafter cited in text.

[116] Dana Rabin argues that by excluding black slaves from the history of villeinage, jurists differentiated between the present-day slavery of black subjects and the historical servitudes of white, English subjects, thereby redefining black subjects as irreducibly "foreign" to England and English history. Consequently, racial difference was strengthened by the debate surrounding *Somerset*, even though it ostensibly ignored race as a central fact of the modern slavery system and produced an outcome that immediately benefited black subjects. See: Rabin, "'In a Country of Liberty?': Slavery, Villeinage and the Making of Whiteness in the Somerset Case (1772)," *History Workshop Journal* 72 (Autumn 2011): 5-29.

> laws, strictly are those confined to a particular place; political, are those in which the municipal laws of many states may and do concur. The relation of husband and wife, I think myself warranted in questioning, as a natural relation: Does it subsist for life; or to answer the natural purposes which may reasonably be supposed often to terminate sooner? Yet this is one of those relations which follow a man everywhere. (12)

In contrast to a marriage founded upon the biological imperative to reproduce, Dunning defines modern marriage as a relation forged by local and national laws that expressly prevent marriage's termination and enable its bonds to "follow a man everywhere." In this description, slavery depends upon marriage's imagined legal uniformity for its permanence and rigidity—even if that dependency serves to imply that marriage makes men into fugitive slaves, bound in perpetuity in relations whose "natural purposes" may have long since ceased. Put another way, marriage's movement out of the field of biology and into the field of legal arrangement helps pave the way here for a reading of slavery as a relation mediated by the state, rather than a purely local custom or expression of natural hierarchy. Though Dunning's arguments ultimately failed to satisfy the British courts, it is striking to note that the contestation over slavery revolves here around the presumption that slavery and marriage occupy a shared position as modern legal arrangements decoupled rhetorically from discussions about racial difference or the biological reproduction of "kinlessness" that in practice were essential for organizing and perpetuating the enslaved condition in the British colonies.

Despite their differences, then, Dunning and Hargrave could be seen as participating in a shared attempt to make slavery legible to the modern legal system. Though they imagine slavery as a personal relation, they each argue that slavery departed in fundamental ways from the kinships of "blood and family" that might be said to define feudal servitude on the one hand and "natural" sexual relations on the other. For Hargrave, that departure signifies slavery's illegitimacy within an English legal system that can only sanction enduring servitudes grounded in ancient kinship bonds; for Dunning, that departure signifies, on the contrary, that slavery resembles marriage, but only insofar as marriage was grounded in municipal rather than natural laws. By reading slavery as a social

relation bound by municipal law yet forged between private citizens, both Hargrave and Dunning helped make slavery recognizable as a modern social relation that bore a striking resemblance to marriage's character as a newly formalized legal, rather than religious, local, or consanguineal, relation.

Once slavery was transformed into a municipal rather than a natural or feudal relation in the eyes of the British courts, it soon became an important touchstone in marriage and divorce cases of the early nineteenth century. By the late eighteenth century, Scottish subjects had increasingly begun to exercise the freedom to divorce that had been granted under Scottish law since the sixteenth century. In contrast to England, where divorce was limited to legal separations that could be obtained only by an act of Parliament, in Scotland, the courts could grant a full divorce that allowed divorced individuals to remarry. As Scotland witnessed what Leah Leneman describes as a "spectacular rise" in divorce cases in the period between 1771 and 1830, English couples, not surprisingly, began to abscond to Scotland, hoping to procure the ability to divorce and legally remarry that was denied them in England.[117] The result was a series of cases, beginning in 1789 and continuing into the 1830s, in which English and Scottish courts were forced to decide the extent to which they should uphold the sharply divergent laws regarding marriage and divorce dictated by their separated legal systems. Was a marriage contracted in England bound by the terms of the marriage contract under English law, or was marital status governed by the laws of the state in which a couple resided? Did the laws of the marriage contract attach themselves to a couple at the moment they said, "I do," or was their marriage redefined every time they crossed state lines?

To answer these questions, the Scottish courts returned to the *Somerset* decision as precedent for their decision to allow English couples to pursue divorce in Scotland. In a series cases brought before the Scottish courts in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the lower Commissary

[117] Leah Leneman, *Alienated Affections: The Scottish Experience of Divorce and Separation 1684-1830* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998), 13.

Courts and higher Court of Sessions debated whether the legality of divorce for English couples in Scotland ought to be decided according to *lex loci contractus*, the law of the land in which the contract was first agreed upon, or according to their domicile, the law of the land in which the couple now resided. A Report for the Faculty of Advocates reproduced by Fergusson in his treatise on Scottish/English marriage and divorce cases, noted that the arguments for the pursuers in three divorce cases (Thomas Edmonstone, Mary (Butler) Forbes, and Jane (Duntze) Levett) turned to Somerset and Knight's cases particularly as evidence that the character of "domestic relations" depended on domicile, not *lex loci contractus*. The pursuers' attorneys, Fergusson reported, argued that "this being a question of *status* and domestic relation, [it] ought to be governed by the law of the domicil as has been expressly found in the case of a slave brought into this country from the plantations; Knight against Wedderburn, 15th January 1778, and the English case of Somerset, the negro, there referred to."[118] In their response, the higher court affirmed the comparison. While generally a contract ought to be enforced according to the *lex loci*, the justices concluded,

> there is another set of cases in which also the *lex loci* is disregarded; I mean those cases in which the *lex loci* is contrary to the general and universal rules of justice. This may be exemplified by the decision in the case of Knight, the negro, 15th January 1770. His master bought him as a slave in Jamaica, where such purchases are legal. Neither the purchase, nor the legality of it according to the *lex loci*, were denied; but the Court held, that the dominion assumed over the negro under that law, being in itself unjust, could not be supported in this country to any extent, and a judgment, proceeding on the same principles, was pronounced in England in the case of Somerset.[119]

These cases betray an important irony, in that by turning to the *Somerset* decision, they also turned to a doctrine of status rather than contract to transform marriage into a dissolvable social relation. In

[118] James Fergusson, *Reports of Some Recent Decisions by the Consistorial Court of Scotland in Actions of Divorce, Concluding for Dissolution of Marriage Celebrated Under the English Law*, Volume III, Printed in *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the English Ecclesiastical Courts with Tables of Cases and Principal Matters*, ed. Edward D. Ingraham (Philadelphia: P. H. Nicklin and T. Johnson, Law Booksellers, 1832), 497.

[119] Ibid., 502

the case of *Somerset*, the justices argued, it was England's refusal to recognize slavery as a status that allowed the English courts to dissolve the slavery bond when slaveholders brought their slaves onto English soil. Similarly, when English couples came to Scotland, they argued, Scotland retained the right to determine the status of those couples, and to transform that status from married to unmarried if they so chose. Though the arguments in the *Somerset* case rejected as outmoded the notion that a form of status determined by kinship bonds or blood ties could persist in the nineteenth century, they created a new form of legal status that the courts drew upon to set Somerset free. In cases where the Scottish courts agreed to grant English couples a divorce, they likewise developed a distinct interpretation of marriage and its relationship to contract and status that derived in part from slavery decisions such as *Somerset*, drawing on a similar conception of legal status to make their marriage laws flexible in the ways they saw fit.

By insisting upon marriage as a "question of *status*," rather than a relation governed by the laws of contract, Scottish jurists adhered to what Halley describes as the "family law exceptionalism" of the nineteenth century, which sought to separate domesticity from the realm of contract to which economic markets and labor, political rule, and the law itself were all theorized to belong in this period.[120] That status, as it was conceived of in both the *Somerset* decision and the *Edmonstone*, *Forbes*, and *Levett* divorce cases, diverged in practice from the incontrovertible form imagined by Stewart's attorney, who claimed that as a status relation, the marriage tie, like the slavery bond, must "follow a man everywhere." But as Halley points out, this new category of legal status, set aside from the realm of contract, would soon be used primarily to render the family form more constrictive and rigidly defined rather than less.

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[120] In *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Amy Dru Stanley notes that while social contract theory, the notion that contract animated "political sovereignty," had fallen out of fashion in political thought by the nineteenth century, contract simply migrated from political to economic and private models of sovereignty, including "domestic authority" (17).

It is important to notice that by aligning the right to divorce and anti-slavery outcomes, these cases also ironically reversed England's relationship to its own history of emancipation, by recasting English law not as libratory but instead as the source of social constraints that Scottish law alone could loosen. In the eyes of British commentators, Scottish divorce policy seemed to offer a more inclusive form of marriage, that provided women with both an avenue by which they could petition for legal separation and, perhaps more importantly, the recognition of legal personhood that was the implied precondition of that petition. Though, as Leneman notes, very few English couples ever sought out a Scottish divorce in practice, the divergence between Scottish and English law could not help but throw into relief England's commitment to legal coverture. In an 1855 essay published in Charles Dickens's periodical *Household Words*, W. H. Wills argued that "There is no fiction in the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, in the Memoirs of the Baron Munchausen, or in the Journey to the Moon, more wildly extravagant than some of the fictions of English law"; but while many "[p]erversions of truth and nature" have been purged from the law, "others remain,"

> [a]mongst them, few represent injustice pushed to the extreme of absurdity more vividly than that legal fiction—an English wife….The proclaiming of the bans in an English church is a proclamation of outlawry—a due notice that the woman is to be banned from the protection of the law.[121]

Denied the right to own property, to leave a will, to collect wages, sign contracts, or prosecute her offenders, the English wife was a stranger to the English courts. Of all of these injustices, it is divorce that the author dwells on most of all, lamenting that "[t]he short cut to the Gordian knot of misery, Divorce" remains beyond the reach of the wife "except under circumstances of extreme atrocity."[122] But worse still was the way in which Scottish law had shed light on the English wife's legal obscurity:

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[121] [William Henry Wills], "A Legal Fiction" (*Household Words* 11, 278, July 21, 1855), 598. Authorship information for this essay comes from *Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850-1859 Conducted by Charles Dickens* (Compiled by Anne Lohrli, Buffalo: The University of Toronto Press, 1973), 141.

[122] Ibid., 598.

> If anything could add to the ridicule and absurdity of this part of the law, it is the fact that, although it is law in England, it is not law in Scotland….What golden magic is there in the silver Tweed that, dividing the Scottish from the English matron, throws over the one the shield of the law, and overlooks the other as a legal fiction?[123]

In contrast to England, Wills concludes, in Scotland, "in consequence of its protection of women," and its willingness to grant divorce, "[t]he marriage-tie is a mere lovers' knot."[124] Replacing the "Gordian knot" of the unhappy marriage with the "true lovers' knot" of the dissolvable "marriage-tie," the author evokes and reworks slavery's shackles as, on the one hand, the intractable constraints of English marital misery and, on the other, the looser, affectionate entanglements of more flexible Scottish bonds. The lovers' bond is never far from the misery of bondage; it is divorce law alone that prevents marriage from tightening the ties of the former until it becomes the latter. By granting those divorces, moreover, Scotland paved the way for the recognition of legal personhood denied to wives under English laws. To cast Scotland in the role of moral arbiter, resistant to foreign marriage laws and protective of women's rights, was, therefore, to cast England and its family laws as unjust, constraining, and, significantly, unfree. Though Scottish jurists cited *Somerset*, these citations come to seem ironic when we realize that they served to invert England's role in that case, from the land of emancipatory freedom to a land where man and wife were perpetually, indissolubly, and, if the couples seeking divorce in Scotland were any indication, unwillingly and unfaithfully bound to one another.

And in reality, English law was indeed increasingly strengthening its view of domestic relations as an indestructible bond—a view that would go on to unite marriage and slavery in new ways. In 1811, the English courts found William Martin Lolly guilty of bigamy after he attained a divorce in Scotland and then remarried in England, strengthening the permanence of marital status for English couples by asserting, "no foreign court could dissolve a marriage in England by an

[123] Ibid., 599.

[124] Ibid., 599.

Englishman."[125] At the same time, the precedent set in *Somerset* began to erode, as the English legal system carved out a more permanent form of status that might attach British slaves to slaveholders even in England. In a period when the durability of English marriages was being openly tested in the Scottish and English courts, the courts redefined "domestic slavery" as a model for a more permanent domestic relationship that could counter the actions of the Scottish courts in cases like *Lolly*.

A small but compelling set of cases from the early decades of the nineteenth century suggest that legislators began to constrict the meaning of "domestic slavery" and, more importantly, to delimit the term to an increasingly feminized vision of the domestic slave, whose enslavement seemed to rest less on legal jurisdiction than upon the kinds of social and affective bonds that were imagined to exist between master and slave. Though, as Hargrave's arguments demonstrate, the relation between master and domestic slave was not "political," it was quite clearly a relation mediated by and affixed to the state. But by the early nineteenth century, slavery sympathizers sought to imagine slavery as a special legal and relational status that, like coverture, could paradoxically place its occupants outside the bounds of the public legal sphere, and therefore more firmly beyond the reach of modern law and its norms of consent, contractualism, and personal autonomy.

In 1807, Britain passed the Slave Trade Acts, banning the transportation of slaves across national and colonial borders throughout the Atlantic. Excluded from the Acts were three classes of slaves: seamen, fishermen, and domestics. Specifically, the Acts stipulated that "nothing in this Act contained shall extend, or be construed to extend, to prevent any Slave who shall be really and truly the Domestic Servant of any Person residing in any Island, Colony, Plantation, or Territory belonging or under the dominion of His Majesty, from attending such his Owner or Master, or any

[125] Leneman, *Alienated Affections*, 224.

part of his family, by Sea to any Place whatever, whether under dominion of His Majesty or of any Foreign, State, or Power."[126] In contrast to the 1772 *Somerset* decision, the 1807 Abolition Acts understand "domestic slavery" to refer to a more specific subset of slaves, whose status exempts them from the laws intended to restrict the scope of slavery across the Atlantic. In response, debate once again surfaced about the meaning of "domestic slavery" and its relationship to what were perceived to be more legitimate forms of social relations in nineteenth-century England. Implicated in these debates was the question of what kinds of intimacies deserved to be excepted from the Acts. Whereas Charles Stewart's attorney had, in *Somerset*, sought to bind slaves to the legal system through comparisons to marriage's juridical dimensions, these later cases seek to define a "domestic" form of slavery whose continuation depended upon jurists' willingness to exempt such personal relations from existing legal statutes. In contrast to an eighteenth-century desire to define slavery as a legal relation in order to make that slavery legible to British law, these cases evince a sense that domestic slavery could now come to represent a desire for forms of social relations that were meaningful precisely because they were placed beyond the reach of the law or state intervention. While abolition comes to be associated with the triumphs of that liberal order, in other words, slavery would come to seem like a space preserved from that order and particularly from the legal system that ostensibly upheld it.

Attorney J. Best, in the 1823 case *Forbes v. Cochrane* declared that "Slavery is a local law, and if a man wishes to preserve his slaves, let him attach them to himself by the ties of affection, or make fast the bars of their prison; for the moment they get beyond his local limits, they have broken their chains and have recovered their liberty."[127] The "local law" he imagines seems to be not the

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[126] 46 Geo. III Cap. 52, *British and Foreign State Papers 1817-1818*, compiled by the Librarian and Keeper of the Papers, Foreign Office (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1837), Google Books e-book, 553-4.

[127] *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of King's Bench During Trinity and Michaelmas Terms in*

municipal law of the slave colony or slave state, but the much more sharply confined locality of the slaveholder's home, where affection's centrifugal force and the prison's containing walls come to seem like alternative means of delimiting the radius of slavery's power. Best echoes Wollstonecraft's vision of a pleasurable subjection in which intimacy becomes a form of enslavement, and imaginatively transports that vision to the slave plantation. Newly relocated to case law, however, the affectionate feelings that might afix the slave to his master take on a regulative force as one of the qualities upon which distinctions between slavery and freedom rested for slaves caught in transit in the years between the passage of the Slave Trade Acts and the abolition of slavery later in the 1830s.

In 1827, the McAlisters, a family of British residents of Trinidad, were stopped aboard ship in Bermuda, where they were accused of attempting to transport slaves in violation of the Slave Trade Acts. McAlister claimed that he had purchased Hannah and her four children to serve as domestic slaves during his family's passage back home to Trinidad. While he only had need for Hannah's services, McAlister argued that he had been moved to purchase her children after she had appealed to him to keep the family together, justifying the purchase and transport of all five slaves despite the fact that the children were in reality too young to serve as domestic servants for his family, as he had attempted initially to claim. In his judgment against the defendant, Sir Robinson argued that Hannah's children could be considered domestic slaves of the McAlister family, and therefore that the McAlisters were liable for violating the Slave Trade Acts. In his decision, Robinson writes,

> 'The true question is,' says that learned person, 'were the persons domestic slaves or not? *Hannah* was clearly a domestic slave; and if *Hannah* be a domestic, I think the children must be so till they are of age to be put to some other occupation.' That

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the Fourth Geo IV, *Volume Three,* compiled by James Dowling and Arthur Ryland (London: S. Brooke, 1824), Google Books e-book, 717. This case dealt with fugitive slaves rather than with domestic slaves who arrived in England with their master; nevertheless, Best's rhetoric offers evidence for the role that domestic affection played in defining slavery in this period.

> might be a description of such persons in a popular sense for a plantation inventory or any such purpose, but it appears to me to be a very imperfect exposition of the meaning of the terms used in this act, *really* and *truly* the domestic slaves of the master. These terms seem to imply some specific reference to the previous title of the master, or to the use and employment of the slave, for his personal accommodation.[128]

He concludes that because the children in question, being quite young, were "not capable of any real occupation," and because the term "personal attendance" seems to have little meaning in this instance beyond the fact that they were found on the same ship, "I feel myself bound then to pronounce, that the whole pretext upon which this shipment was made was fictitious and insincere, and contrary to the form and substance of the act" (240). As Robinson's verdict makes clear, "domestic slavery" now seems to require a specific form of personal attendance that could ideally be judged, in part, according to its duration in time in addition to or in place of the domestic labor required to fulfill the title. Yet the demand for a more "personal" category of slavery also remains impermeable to humanist sympathies. Robinson dismisses the notion that McAlister's compassion for Hannah sufficiently demonstrates the personal character of their relationship, explaining that while McAlister "professes to have been actuated by motives of compassion and tenderness towards the children, and from an anxiety to prevent the separation of the family…this is a consideration on which he was not at liberty to act in opposition to the restraints imposed by the statute" (237). Robinson's insistence that the attachments of personal attendance can distinguish domestic slavery from agricultural slavery are unintentionally thrown into relief by his denial of the integrity of the slave family as a legitimate object of concern, even as he attempts to parse the depth and sincerity of feeling between McAlister and Hannah. Robinson was surely right to question the sincerity of McAlister's "compassion" for the woman whose slavery and permanent transport he had just

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[128] *Adelaide. Perenchief,* 24 February 1829, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the High Court of Admiralty During the Time of the Right Hon. Lord Stowell, and of the Right Hon. Sir Christopher Robinson*, By John Haggard, Volume 2 (London: Saunders and Benning, 1833), Google Books e-book. 238-9. Hereafter cited in text.

arranged. But his indifference towards this domain of feeling only serves to underscore the tensions inherent to the law: what Robinson in effect demands is that McAlister authenticate and provide a history for his relation to his slave—a relation that is defined by the way in which it offers the fabricated bondage of servitude as a replacement for the familial history and parental bonds that slavery works to dismantle or, as Robinson's decision suggests, occlude altogether.

Perhaps the most important instance in which British Atlantic slavery helped script slavery's affective and implicitly gendered dimensions can be found in *The Case of Slave Grace*, one of the cases cited by Burge. The case revolved around Grace Jones, a slave who was taken from Antigua to England with her mistress, Mrs. Allen, in 1822, and returned to Antigua a year later, in 1823. According to Shyllon, Jones "continued to reside there as her domestic slave" until 1825, was she was seized by customs officers "on the ground that there had been a contravention of the slave laws in the circumstances of her exportation from Antigua to England, and her re-importation."[129] In his *précis* of the matter at hand, Lord Stowell, an influential British judge, described the case as one concerning the status of domestic slaves specifically:

> A female attendant, by birth and servitude a domestic slave, accompanied her mistress to England, resided there for a year, and then voluntarily returned with her mistress to the place of her birth and servitude; though during the residence in England no dominion, authority, or coercion, can be exercised over such person, yet, on her return to her place of birth and servitude, the right to exercise such dominion revives.[130]

In ruling that Jones's journey to England did not free her from slavery permanently, Stowell ostensibly draws new boundaries around the freedom that residence in England permits, ruling that the freedom accorded to ex-slaves like Somerset applies only for as long as they are residents of England, and stops short of the place of their birth, where the condition of slavery originally

[129] Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain*, 210.

[130] *The Judgment of the Right Hon. Lord Stowell Respecting the Slavery of the Mongrel Woman Grace, on an Appeal from the Vice-Admiralty Court of Antigua*, compiled by John Haggard (London: W. Benning, 1827), Google Books e-book, 94. Hereafter cited in text.

attached to them. As Edlie Wong has detailed, in Stowell's decision, he infamously recast Jones's kidnapping as a "voluntary return," attributing her journey back to Antigua to a consenting desire to return to her "place of birth and servitude."[131] In doing so, Wong argues, Stowell invented a "paradoxical fiction of voluntary slavery," that "deemed the slaves willful free agents in legal form so that" a slave like Grace could seem both "free in England but slave upon voluntary return to the West Indies."[132] Wong goes on to argue that abolitionists contested this portrayal by casting "enslaved women as innocent victims" who were unable "to act for themselves." "Such rhetoric," Wong argues, "tended to feminize all slaves from the viewpoint of [antislavery campaigns'] rescue narrative."[133] By recasting Jones's return as "voluntary," Stowell implicitly reframed domestic slavery as a privileged bondage that stood in contrast to the unjust enslavement of freemen trapped within what he imagined to be a more violent chattel slavery system. In doing so, however, he also gave this paradox a competing feminized form that depended less on passivity than on the presumed privileges of domesticity. Though at odds with the antislavery campaigns' more familiar gendering of slavery, Stowell's differently feminized form of slavery, I argue, would resonate with tropes of both earlier English feminism and with the marriage plots that were to develop in English fiction in the following decades in surprisingly ways.

In order to help secure Jones's "reattachment," Stowell's argues that the personal history that binds the individual to the place of citizenship is marked by the intertwined conditions of "birth and servitude"—of being born and being made a slave. We thus might read the term "domestic slavery" as one that thus accrues a certain set of ironies, as Jones's condition of being enslaved comes to depend upon being "at home" in Antigua and upon her position secreted as a slave inside

[131] Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free*, 46.

[132] Ibid., 46-7.

[133] Ibid., 56.

their home on English soil. If Jones's "domestic slavery" is tied to her place of birth, however, it is also tied to her position within the Allan home. In Stowell's rendering, Jones's slavery comes to represent a different understanding of the domestic, not as a space defined by contracts agreed to privately but nonetheless shaped by state regulation, but instead as a largely feminized space defined by the female slave's dependency upon the slavemaster—a dependency that conjured certain forms of feeling that seemingly defied legal intervention (albeit ironically, given the very real role that the courts played in securing Grace's return to bondage). Stowell's decision thus represents a shift in the understanding of domestic slavery away from a slavery that mirrored marriage formally but not necessarily affectively, towards a slavery more closely tied to both a feminized understanding of domesticity and to a resuscitated feudal world in which the slave's servitude, like that of the villein, was tied to heredity and locality. But while Stowell at first appears to place questions of inborn status at the forefront of his analysis, I want to suggest that the condition of domestic slavery is marked more by a set of relational and emotional terms—including privilege and obligation, dependency and care, familiarity and affection—that translate an outmoded discourse of blood-based status into the more modern, though notably conservative, language of familial feeling that binds slaves and masters to one another. In her reading of the case, Wong argues that Stowell drew upon a concept of "implied consent" that "declared slaves to have *voluntarily* chosen slavery over freedom," as slavery was reimagined as a contract to which slaves implicitly if not explicitly consented by returning to their colonial homes.[134] But by relying upon the exceptionalism of the domestic slave figured in the Slave Trade Acts, Stowell also, at times, helped to distinguish slavery and domesticity equally as forms of social attachment that were particularly durable and extensive because they fell outside of the realm of contractualism and thus circumvented the question of consent altogether. To do so, Stowell turned the ungendered legal category of the domestic slave into a feminized form that

[134] Ibid., 38.

recast the slave as a privileged dependent rather than a contractual individual. In legal terms, Stowell sought to reframe slavery's status designation as one that might, as Dunning had argued, allow slavery's bonds to persist even when slaves crossed colonial or national borders. But by paying attention to the particular forms of feeling that were understood to attach Jones to the Allans, we can also come to see how Stowell and other commentators also reworked the trope of the "voluntary slave" in order, additionally, to rework the question of consent by reframing enslavement as a form of dependency in which the slave could be willing and yet lack the autonomy necessary for contractual consent. If Stowell turns Grace Jones into a symbol for a subjection wedded to the familiar attachments and privileges of home, he does so by imagining a home that preserves forms of feeling more recognizable from the vanishing world of feudal status that precede and so might escape the demands of contract and consent altogether.

To do so, Stowell draws a contrast between the masculine freedoms guaranteed by the *Somerset* case, and the feminine forms of attachment and protection that define the condition of the domestic slave. Reinterpreting the *Somerset* decision as a case less about legal reform than about the uses and limits of physical force, Stowell emphasizes that the *Somerset* decision turns not so much upon the legitimacy of colonial slavery as upon the necessity of force to maintain a practice of slavery on English soil. Stowell argues that "The real and sole question which the case of Sommersett brought before Lord Mansfield, as expressed in the return to the *mandamus*, was, whether a slave could be taken from this country in irons, and carried back to the West Indies, to be restored to the dominion of his master? And all the answer, perhaps, which that question required, was, that the party who was a slave could not be sent out of England *in such a manner* and *for such a purpose*." (107, emphasis mine). What makes Somerset visible as a free subject in England, in Stowell's eyes, is that Somerset was removed from England *in irons*—in other words, through a visible application of force. Throughout his decision, Stowell posits this violent force as the

limitation that prevents the continuation of Atlantic slavery on English soil: "The arguments of counsel do not go further than to establish that the methods of force and violence which are necessary to maintain slavery are not practicable upon this spot" (110). It is not, in other words, the abrogation of an abstract liberty but rather the practice of violence that renders slavery unfit for English soil; "slavery" is impracticable because the use of the whip could not be countenanced in England. This reasoning implies that slavery only becomes visible as an affront to the law in those moments when physical force or physical restraint is exercised upon the body. In return, Stowell imagines the scene by which the freedman protests his return to slavery in language of physical confrontation and violent resistance that stands in marked contrast to Jones's attempts to beseech the protection of the law on her behalf:

> There is no statute whatever that imposes upon a free person the vindication of his freedom by submitting to a procedure so humiliating to a freeman as to sue for it, at the mercy of the crown, under a process which places him at the disposal of the officer of the crown, and subject to all such situations as the slave-abolition laws would warrant….The person who sues for his freedom in the manner proposed must submit himself to be apprenticed, or to be enlisted, or placed in some other situation, at the discretion of the officer of the crown. Is that a manner in which a free person ought to assert his right? What has he to do but to bring his action against the defamer of his rights?—and who can doubt but that he would recover most overwhelming damages against the person who had assaulted his freedom, and compelled him to submit to a process that is only applicable to a slave, and to pour upon his gross wrongdoer the whole vengeance of the law? In short, the whole of this procedure is inapplicable to a freeman. It may seem more likely to initiate him into a state of slavery, but it is utterly inconsistent with a spirit of freedom—that spirit which would enable its possessor to resent the outrage with which he was threatened, and, without those degradations, to restore him to himself unaided by such a proceeding as could only be instituted against a person already in a state of slavery. (102)

Though, ostensibly, Stowell is arguing here that the freedman ought to bring a legal claim against those who attempt to return him "in irons" to slavery, his descriptions of that claim construct a subject whose individuation and, indeed, whose recognition as a free subject before the law, depends upon his ability to "pour…the whole vengeance of the law" without the aid of the law itself. In other words, while Stowell couches the freedman's "vengeance" in an appeal to the law, he seems to

imagine that appeal not as a legal suit but as a violent overcoming, that meets the "assault" upon his freedom with a vengeful assault of his own—one whose violence might not just be rhetorical. Stowell argues here that slavery and freedom are organized around moments of corporeal violence. Under this organization, the enslaved subject can move between two states: enslavement, defined by the reduction of the subject to a corporeality that is suffering, constrained, and, presumably as chattel, a transferable object of "portable" property, and freedom, defined as a radical individuality that makes itself visible through violent exertions. Notably, however, both states—slavery and freedom—in this construction share a focus on the individual as a detachable unit who, even when owned, is fundamentally alienated from the bonds that would render him "untransferable." According to this logic, the slave might be subject to radical constraint, but both his alienability and the violence he suffers make him visible as an individuated atom, whose bondage is distinct from the bonds of familial or social life. He is also, in Stowell's description, an emphatically male subject, a "freeman" even when he has fallen into a state of slavery.

Where the arguments in *Somerset* imagine a male slavery that is at the same time domestic, Stowell revises these categories, to separate out a masculine slavery and masculine freedom defined by violent force and violent overcoming from an implicitly feminized domestic slavery where the protection accorded by the law seems indistinguishable from the protections offered by slaveholder's family. Thus Stowell's purpose in introducing the specter of the freeman into his decision is to define the terms against which Jones's slavery, and her slavery suit, ought to be understood. In defining "domestic slavery," Stowell turns away from the language of physicalized violence that he applies to his imagining of the "freeman," towards a language of protection and privilege. He explains that while advocates of the notion that "once free, forever free" imagine a strict teleological progression from slavery to freedom that cannot be reversed, in practice, the condition of domestic servitude is a more fluidly defined one:

> …even in the case of slavery, slaves themselves possess rights and privileges in one character which they are not entitled to in another. The domestic slave may, in that character, by law accompany his master or mistress to any part of the world, but that privilege exists no longer than his character of domestic slave attaches to him; for should the owner deprive him of the character of being a domestic slave by employing him as a field slave, he would be deprived of the right of accompanying his master out of the colony. (114)

In Stowell's description, domestic slavery represents a status distinct from field slavery, one which confers "rights and privileges" upon the domestic slave. Yet the privileges that domestic slavery confers are not freedoms so much as the extension of slavery renamed in the language of protection and attachment. The privilege that the domestic slave earns, in other words, is the privilege of a relation with the master or mistress that extends outward from colony to metropole. For the domestic slave, bondage has been reconceived as an attachment, which reconstructs subjection into a privilege that, along with the newly extendable "domestic" sphere, stretches from Antigua to cover the globe.

Domestic slaves are thus granted radically different alternatives from those offered to masculine field slaves. The field slave, as Stowell imagines him, can move between the bodily subjection of slavery and the radical individuality of a freedom forged through violence. The domestic slave, by contrast, can either fall into the deprivations of field slavery, or they can move for the protection of the English courts. Accounts of Jones's case, which as Shyllon notes were published in *The Times* throughout the summer of 1827, suggest that her case, and the case of domestic slaves more generally, was interpreted as a matter not of slavery and freedom but of competing interpretations of the person to whom Jones owed her protection—never mind that this "protection" had not prevented her from being kidnapped while still on English soil. As *The Times* reports, one of the attorneys for the defense argued that the manumission of domestic slaves still working in English homes following the *Somerset* decision was not only impractical, but would also cause direct harm by breaking the "ties" that, in Stowell's construction, were one of the central

privileges accorded to domestic rather than field slaves:

> There were many slaves in this country at that period: Mr. Dunning said 14000; but suppose only 40; did none of these 40 go back? If they did, why was this the first time the question was raised? But the argument of his learned friends out to go further; it ought to be this—that it was in the power of the master and slave to keep up this relation; that all the ties of gratitude and affection, which it is known do subsist on the part of the slave, must be broken; that the slave shall separate, and shall not return to his master, but be forced to pick up a precarious subsistence from charity.[135]

Meanwhile, Jones's own attorneys drew upon her uncertain status to raise alarm about the ways in which domestic slavery's extension onto English soil imperiled the marriage contract. *The Times* reports that Jones's lawyers argued that, "whilst in this country, the woman might have contracted matrimony, apprenticeship, and other engagements. She went back and he (Dr. Lushington) wished to know whether a free Englishman, who might have married this woman, was to have his wife made a slave? Whether her children must want a mother? or, if they went to her, must become slaves themselves? Was this agreeable to equity and conscience? Was her property to become her master's, and her children have none?"[136] The domestic slave's emancipation could only be negotiated through other webs of responsibility and care owed.

Reading Jones's case alongside *The History of Mary Prince*, Wong argues that "[t]he cases of Grace and Prince illuminate the duplicity of slaveholders invoking the will and consent of enslaved persons to secure the fiction of 'choice' in their reenslavement," by construing their forced returns to slavery as a decision made freely and consentingly.[137] But while Wong is undoubtedly correct in arguing that these cases "obscure the difference between 'consent' and 'entrapment,'" the very notion that Jones felt "gratitude and affection" towards the Allans suggests that Jones's return to Antigua was misconstrued as non-coercive precisely because her status as a domestic slave left open

[135] *The Times* (25 July 1827), 3. Cited in Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain*, 211.

[136] *The Times* (27 June 1827), 3. Cited in Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain*, 211.

[137] Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free*, 51.

no avenue for the expression of individualist agency that defines the English freedman of Stowell's construction.[138] To stay in England would be to subject herself to a system of charity whose protections constitute subjection under a different name by rendering her dependent upon the British state, while depriving her of the warm feelings that defined her position of "dependency" within the Allan home in the imagination of the Allans' attorney.[139] Freedom from domestic slavery results not in self-possessed individualism, but in the twin dispossessions of pauperism and exile from her place of "birth and servitude" in Antigua and from the Allan home. Domestic slavery, in other words, seems defined by a web of dependency that is noticeably distinct from the constrained independence of the slave/freeman who features in Stowell's version of the *Somerset* decision, producing an imagined form of slavery in which the slave is not only attached to the slaveholding family, but even in freedom remains tethered, dependent, and in need either of charitable state assistance or of the protections of the husband. Under these conditions, freedom from slavery comes to look at best like the freedom to marry—a state whose difference from the privileges and protections of domestic slavery may have been difficult for Victorian audiences to discern, precisely because all parties involved seem to have been committed to imagining Jones's subjection as a

[138] Ibid., 46.

[139] The term "dependency" takes on particular significance in relation to the history of abolition and the rise of the welfare state in both England and America. In an American context, Franke has argued that the aftermath of slavery coincided with the increased emphasis placed upon the family as a unit in which responsibility for dependent charges such as wives and children was placed upon the newly independent husband, an arrangement that would supplant the need for a robust welfare state. In a British context, Lauren Goodlad and Bruce Robbins have described how figures such as the pastor, the patron, and the benefactor served as representative figures in the transition away from citizens' dependence upon familial care towards a welfare state in England, a transition that was at best ambivalent in the nineteenth century. The contestation between familial dependencies and dependency upon a welfare state is visible in these debates insofar as the domestic slave seems poised between a dependence upon the slaveholding family, the husband, and charity, all of which stand in contrast to her forceful beseeching of the state to intervene on her behalf. See: Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003) and Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

question of competing affectionate attachments, rather than through the starker binaries of subjection and individual agency that have come to define debates around the condition of slaves and the condition of women, respectively, in the nineteenth century. Within this framework, Jones could seem "willing" in her attachments even while denied any claims to autonomous free will that might allow her to one day experience individual freedom. In this way, Jones came to embody a form of "willing slavery" that could seem both willful and radically divorced from the forms of individuality recognized by British law. This willing slavery in effect transformed feudal notions of status that, in Hargrave's description, depended upon the kinships of blood and longstanding relation into a different but no less binding form of legal status delimited by feeling and specifically the subjective condition of dependency. In doing so, willing slavery mirrored broader shifts in the definition of family away from blood relation to ties forged through feeling, but in order to maintain the underlying rigidity of status designations rather than move away from them.

If Grace Jones represents a form of slavery that might escape the emancipatory demands of nineteenth-century abolition and the precedent set by the earlier *Somerset* decision, then, she does so by absorbing the contradictions of not only of the slavery system, but also of an early English feminism that imagined familial pleasure as a (negative) form of willing slavery. Like the "voluntary slave" of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, Grace Jones also appears here as a subject for whom privilege is inseparable from the dependencies epitomized by the slavery system. But where English feminists sought to make visible the broader political dominations and disabilities that turned wives into willing slaves, and therefore decry them, Stowell and the writers for *The Times* embrace the domestic slave's dependency as a welcome refuge from other, more "precarious" dependencies available to the free female individual—dependencies that include local charity and the protections offered by the courts. Picking up feminists' claims that pleasure produces willing slaves, Stowell reinvents the trope to affirm that slavery offers a more privileged—and perhaps more desirable—form of

dependency than those offered to legally free persons by the liberal state. Supplanting the English wife with the domestic slave, Stowell manages in a single stroke not only to deny the slave's claims to freedom but also, by imagining slavery as a desirable and legitimate attachment, to reject feminists' claims that such attachments might be undesirable or unjust.

Attempting to retrace the legal history of the early Victorian family thus leads us, along with Burge, to the figure of Grace Jones, whose re-enslavement undermines the clarity with which slavery and freedom, as well as slavery and marriage, could be distinguished from one another, particularly within a sphere that the law names "domestic." Grace Jones stands out as a figure whose re-enslavement, cast in the role of the newly feminized domestic slave, cannot be easily re-assimilated to a progressive antislavery teleology. As such, she seems almost to disappear as quickly as Burge refers to her case, remaining only as a footnote to Burge's text, and to a Victorian culture that seems determined to forget that slavery was ever "domestic" to England.

Indeed, by the 1860s, the decade consumed with the legal reform of Victorian marriage, it will become evident that it is precisely in comparisons between slavery and marriage that the work of forgetting Britain's own history of domestic slavery begins to take effect, as these comparisons begin to relocate the connection between slavery and the family to another distant past. Sharon Marcus has detailed the rise of a genre of Victorian anthropology devoted to studying the history of the family, and of marriage in particular in the 1860s, with the publication of texts such as Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861) and Johann Bachofen's *Mother Right* (1861). As Marcus describes, many of these anthropologists studied the law, and their work centered largely upon locating continuities in the law that survived the transition from an archaic or primitive past to the modern present.[140] In this sense, these texts mirrored legal discussions of slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, that likewise sought to locate connections between modern slavery and its ancient or

[140] Marcus, *Between Women*, 218-9. See, especially: Marcus, "The Genealogy of Marriage," *Between Women*, 193-226.

premodern forms, including feudal villeinage. Just as anthropological accounts of marriage's history ultimately "affirmed that there was no fixed, natural form of marriage law," these accounts, as I have previously suggested, ultimately tended to refuse naturalizing frameworks for understanding slavery, even when their intent was to present justifications for slavery's continuation.[141]

As we might expect, then, these accounts, and more popular critiques of the family, such as Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), that were composed during the same period, returned to slavery as both an analogy for and an essential part of the formation of the family that these texts described. Henry Maine, for example, argued that slaves, while distinct from both those members of the family "who belonged to it by consanguinity" and those "who had been engrafted on it by adoption," nevertheless found that their inferiority "was not such as to place him outside the pale of the Family, or such as to degrade him to the footing of inanimate property" given the "many traces which remain of his ancient capacity for inheritance in the last resort."[142] For Maine, however, the parallel paths of slaves and those members of the family "engrafted on it by adoption"—including wives—ends, in some sense, with the development of contract itself:

> Starting, as from one terminus of history, from a condition of society in which all the relations of Persons are summed up on the relations of Family, we seem to have steadily moved towards a phase of social order in which all these relations arise form the free agreement of individuals. In Western Europe the progress achieved in this direction has been considerable. Thus the status of the Slave has disappeared—it has been superseded by the contractual relation of the servant to his master. (168)

While slavery's "disappearance" may sound like a valuable outcome of the movement from "familial" to contractual relations, Maine argues that English Common Law (in contrast to ancient Roman law), "as recently interpreted, has no true place for the Slave, and can only therefore regard him as chattel" (161); this "disappearance," in other words, does not abolish slavery but intensifies it,

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[141] Ibid., 219.

[142] Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 159. Hereafter cited in text.

by rendering the slave "inanimate property" excluded from even the most tenuous bonds of familial protection.

Maine provides a nuanced account of the interlocking development of slavery and family arrangements in both ancient and English history; yet when he turns to discuss its modern instantiations, he focuses exclusively on the American South, with the exception of the single allusion to English Common Law I've quoted above. The turn to American slavery of course makes sense, given that the 1860s were also marked by the American Civil War. Yet the relative absence of British slavery is striking, given how significant domestic slavery cases were to discussions of marriage in Burge's treatise and in Scottish family law cases. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill offers an even more dramatic example of the ways in which "domestic slavery" comes to seem both central to and absent from the story about the family told by English writers in this decade. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Mill followed writers like Wollstonecraft and Thompson in adopting the language of "willing slavery" to describe the paradoxes of women's subjection in marriage, which demands, Mill explains, not only women's "obedience" but their "sentiments."[143] Mill understands this subjection in the context *both* of the actual slavery system in the Southern United States *and* of a largely speculative account of ancient or primitive slavery. But while he observes that "Less than forty years ago, Englishmen might still by law hold human beings in bondage as saleable property," he also argues that "those who profited by it were a very small numerical fraction of the country, while the natural feeling of all who were not personally interested in it was unmitigated abhorrence" (480). As a result, British slavery's relationship to Victorian marriage becomes something of a lacuna in Mill's text.

Mill does describe at length marriage's resemblance to "domestic slavery," but in doing so, he places the practice in the ancient past, distinct from the slavery system of the nineteenth century.

[143] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," *On Liberty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 486. Hereafter cited in text.

Mill argues that "Hardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and all minutes" in the way that wives are; by contrast, the modern slave "has, like a soldier, his fixed task, and when it is done…he disposes, within certain limits, of his own time, and has a family life into which the master rarely intrudes" (504). By contrast, those instances in which the slave's attachment to his master resemblances that of the wife to her husband are largely a relic of ancient history: "If an appeal be made to the intense attachments which exist between wives and their husbands, exactly as much may be said of domestic slavery. It was quite an extraordinary fact in Greece and Rome for slaves to submit to death by torture rather than betray their masters. In the proscriptions of the Roman civil wars, it was remarked that wives and slaves were heroically faithful, sons very commonly treacherous" (507). Mill's account clearly mirrors the image of the domestic slave described in British law, as not only faithfully attached to the slavery, but personally attendant upon the slavemaster. At the same time, however, Mill places this image firmly within the ancient period. Even if we are to read Mill's denial of domestic slavery as an English practice as a necessary revision, one that accounts for the fictive nature of "domestic slavery" as it was portrayed in British law in prior decades, it is notable that this denial nonetheless does not lead to a more accurate account of slavery as it was practiced in the colonies; instead, Mill simply replaces "domestic slavery" with a modern vision of working-class domesticity that he projects onto the slave plantation. This substitution suggests that the desire to see in slavery a reflection of the Victorian family persisted long after slavery's end. More importantly, by situating slavery's history elsewhere, Mill exemplifies the ways in which even the most direct attempts to recall slavery's relationship to early nineteenth-century English culture forget as much as they remember, reinventing the very past that they imagine shapes their present.

When we turn to the novel, however, we can begin to see how persistently the history of domestic slavery and the story of slavery's bondage to marriage that history represented were

alternately remembered, embraced, or contested as a response to the problem of female agency in indirect ways in Victorian fiction. As fictional characters grapple with the legacy of this history, they also make visible the ways in which novelists themselves grappled with Victorian culture's complicated attachments to memories of the slave past, which never fully disappeared from view, despite novelists' reluctance to represent slavery directly throughout the nineteenth century. In the next section, I turn to *Dombey and Son* as a text that, published two decades before Mill's text, illustrates the process whereby domestic slavery was simultaneously memorialized and forgotten in Victorian culture, as this history becomes both essential to Dickens's skeptical account of contractual marriage and liberal feminism and erased from the novel's memory.

The Afterlife of Domestic Slavery in Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son*

Recent studies of slavery in Dickens's fiction have tended to focus on slavery's relationship to the household objects that fill every corner of his fiction, and the "romance of property" that underlies his domestic scenes. In her reading of *Great Expectations*, Elaine Freedgood argues that the Negro head tobacco Magwitch fills his pipe with makes present to the novel the otherwise distant events of African slavery and Aboriginal genocide, as the material object links empire to the novel through metonymic chains of economic exchange and narrative signification.[144] Jeff Nunokawa's *The Afterlife of Property*, meanwhile, argues that in *Dombey and Son*, slaves' vulnerability to economic circulation turns them into figures for the insecurities of global capitalism. Though wives obtained on the marriage market risk a resemblance to slaves, Nunokawa argues, Dickens transforms those wives into a bulwark against market capitalism instead by reimagining them as unalienable, perpetual property.[145] In both readings, slaves represent a system of property ownership and exchange that

[144] Elaine Freedgood, "Realism, Fetishism, and Genocide: Negro Head Tobacco in and around *Great Expectations*," *The Ideas in Things*, 81-110.

[145] Jeff Nunokawa, "For Your Eyes Only: Private Property and the Oriental Body in *Dombey and Son*," *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Novel.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

threatens to confuse persons with things. Because that scene of exchange ultimately takes place outside of England, however, it can only enter into the novel through processes of narrative substitution (such as metonymy and metaphor) that link the novel's persons and things to a slavery system that is fundamentally alien to English domesticity and English fiction. Paraphrasing Edward Said, Freedgood argues that within the realist novel, "There is virtually no elaboration of what was going on 'out there' in the colonies that might be affecting, or more accurately underwriting, the domestic worlds of novels like *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Dombey and Son* (1848), or *Vanity Fair* (1848)."[146] Rather, the work of bridging colonial and domestic spaces belongs to readers willing to trace the chains of association and figuration suggested by the novels' household objects and proprietorial logic. Though this process can reanimate histories that the novel itself has buried, Freedgood acknowledges that this process, like historical materialist reading methods in themselves, is a "fetishistic" practice that attaches to objects within the novel, as well as to the novel itself, meanings in excess to those they might rightfully be said to contain.

By contrast, Eve Sedgwick's 2003 essay "Around the Performative: Periperformative Vicinities in Nineteenth-Century Narrative" turns away from chains of metonymic or metaphorical connection and towards performative speech acts as the scene where colonial and metropolitan histories intersect within the novel. Sedgwick takes Dickens's fiction as an *exemplum* for what she describes as a "Victorian periperformative topoi" that "yokes together the performative acts and scenes that constitute marriage among British subjects, with the performative acts and scenes thought to characterize the institution of chattel slavery of Africans and their descendants in the New World."[147] For Sedgwick, to invoke slavery in fiction is to consider slavery's role in perfecting

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1994), 40-76.

[146] Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things*, 90.

[147] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Around the Periperformative: Periperformative Vicinities in

and lending power to the structure of the performative speech act and to decenter the performatives at the heart of both the marriage contract and the peculiar institution by unveiling the extent to which those utterances can shift depending upon the conditions of their utterance, including the spatial location and psychological disposition of their speakers and, crucially, their proximity to other performative acts. Placing marriage and slavery in proximity to one another can create new lines of thought around their performance as usual merely by allowing one's perceptival "compass needle [to] tremble with the added magnetism of another numinous center."[148]

Sedgwick's account offers a method for understanding slavery not just as a property relation but as an effect of language's performativity that informs the linguistic performances Dickens stages in his novels. But Sedgwick ultimately joins Freedgood and Nunokawa in imagining the relationship between colonialism and domesticity as a *spatial* relation, one which depends upon acts of reading that bring distant objects (America and England, slaves and wives) into proximity (indeed, Sedgwick defines periperformatives as performatives whose enunciation "in the neighborhood" of other performatives transforms their meaning).[149] While my own reading will follow Sedgwick in considering slavery and marriage as practices linked by the novel's speech acts, I want to turn our attention to the ways in which these dynamics are granted a *temporal* dimension in Dickens's novel, as slavery is imagined not only across space but also across time. By imagining slavery as a precedent for marriage, Dickens suggests that reading marriage properly requires not just acts of metonymic or metaphorical *substitution*, but also a model of memory that might locate within the form of the marriage plot evidence that slavery's afterlife continues to operate not just as a static symbol but as an agent that helps drive the form of the novel's multiple, overlapping marriage plots. Reading

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Nineteenth-Century Narrative," *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Perfomativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 79.

[148] Ibid., 79.

[149] Ibid., 68.

slavery's memory not just as an absent signifier but as a determinative form for the novel allows us to see how the specific affects, speech acts, and emplotments of the novel's marriages are understood by Dickens to have been shaped by (rather than merely to provide a symbol for) the slave past.

Throughout *Dombey and Son*, Dickens investigates the ways in which slavery has shaped Victorian domesticity and Victorian domestic fiction. The example that will be most familiar to readers of the novel is Dickens's depiction of Edith Dombey (née Granger), whose mercenary marriage to financier Paul Dombey is compared, alternately, to prostitution and to chattel slavery. On the eve of her marriage to Dombey, Edith offers what might be the most famous invocation of slavery in the history of the Victorian novel, bitterly declaring "There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years" (432). As critics from Nunokawa to Sedgwick to Amanda Anderson have compellingly argued, Edith's declarative stance might be read as an acutely modern exhortation against an execrable modernity, defined, alternately, by the threat of human commodification, by the constraints of disciplinary social norms, and by the alienation produced by self-reflection itself—each of which are likewise embodied in the figure of the African-American chattel slave that Edith invokes to describe herself.[150] One way of reading slavery's frequent appearance in *Dombey and Son* is as a useful metaphor for portraying the effects not just of modern marriage, but of modern liberalism gone bad.

Dickens's comparison of Edith to a chattel slave thus represents the most sensational, and therefore perhaps most "modern" depiction of slavery in the novel. *Dombey and Son*, however, is a novel concerned with the past as much as with the future, with custom as much as with modernity, with elegy as much as with sensationalism. Thus alongside Edith's narrative stand several

[150] In addition to Nunokawa and Sedgwick, see: Amanda Anderson, *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 85-9.

characters—Uncle Sol, Walter, little Paul Dombey—whose narratives are defined less by freedom and constraint than by a set of relations and moods—familiarity, nostalgia, affection, habit, and indebtedness—that we might describe alternately as sentimental and melancholic. Ostensibly, these narratives are designed to offer a doomed resistance to the encroachments of modernity upon the early Victorian world that gives rise to Edith's modern "slavery." I argue, however, that these narratives *also* offer a meditation on slavery, albeit one complicated by the fact that what these narratives occasion is less critique than a conflicted kind of nostalgia for England's relationship to its slave past. While these plots provide an escape from and perhaps even a solution to the effects slavery has had on the modern world, and modern marriage in particular, I will argue that Dickens details the ways in which the pleasure worlds these narratives promise have been scripted by slavery's past just as much as the alienating future the novel glimpses seems shaped by slavery's nineteenth-century present. By juxtaposing Uncle Sol and Walter's domestic slavery to Edith's chattel slavery, Dickens provides a multivalent account of slavery's relation to the Victorian family, one which locates slavery's imprint upon good marriages as well as bad. Tracing this juxtaposition reveals the influence that the historical phenomenon of British domestic slavery had upon notions of gender, sexuality, and domesticity in Victorian England. More importantly, however, this juxtaposition reveals the ways in which slavery becomes not just an instrument of critique, but also the subject of the novel's conflicted mourning.

Modern Love: Chattel Slavery, Marriage Contracts, and the Limits of Reciprocity

Perhaps more than any other major nineteenth-century British author, Dickens was likely intimately familiar with the intricacies of British divorce law. Early in his career, Dickens worked as a law clerk before becoming a freelance reporter in Doctors' Commons around 1829.[151] From 1834-

[151] Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 31-3. A collection of courts that included the ecclesiastical courts, the Admiralty courts, and the courts of civil law responsible for "matrimonial and slander cases," as well as the offices that granted marriage licenses,

1836, Dickens reported for the *Morning Chronicle*; during this period, the paper published several articles on cases concerning English couples who had sought divorce and remarriage abroad, including at least two pieces on the *Warrender* trial, in which the English House of Lords uncharacteristically upheld the Scottish divorce of a Scottish-English couple.[152] It would be another twenty years before Dickens' very public separation from his wife Catherine in 1858, but by the time Dickens began his career as a novelist, it seems quite possible that he had found opportunities to observe the vagaries of English marriage and divorce laws, and the transnational conflicts that tested those laws, either in the courts or in the pages of the newspapers to which he contributed.

Moreover, concerns over the marriage contract's relationship to the chattel slavery system appear in Dickens's fiction from the beginning. In *Oliver Twist*, it is in fact a marriage contract gone bad that bears the responsibility, albeit indirectly, for Oliver's precarious position—a position that the novel continually compares to the position of the chattel slave.[153] As readers, we see Oliver indentured through a public auction (chapters three and four), "hunted" as a fugitive (77), recaptured by "affectionate friends" whose intent is to exploit him (121), and advertised as a runaway (140) (all while the novel's minor characters move in and out of the West Indian colonies to which the novel continually alludes). Though the novel offers many potential villains responsible for Oliver's perils—the workhouse beadle, the apprenticeship system, the criminal underworld—ultimately, Dickens suggests that the true villain might be found in the union between family law and

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Doctors' Commons included courts involved in marriage and divorce suits, alongside of the High Court of Admiralty court where Stowell issued his judgment in *The Case of Slave Grace*. J. A Cannon, "Doctors' Commons," *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford University Press, 2009), Oxford Reference. In *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) Kelly Hager points out that Dickens's *David Copperfield* is "a novel in which the hero is an apprentice at Doctors' Commons" (132).

[152] Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 31-3.

[153] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist, or, the Parish Boy's Progress* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003). Page numbers will be cited in text.

the bondages of slavery. In Brownlow's retelling, Oliver's father is the victim of a bad marriage and the laws that render such marriage immutable:

> I also know…the misery, the slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union; I know how listlessly and wearily each of that wretched pair dragged on their heavy chain through a world that was poisoned to them both;…I know how indifference gave place to dislike, dislike to hate, and hate to loathing, until at last they wrenched the clanking bond asunder, and retiring to a wide space apart, carried each a galling fragment, of which nothing but death could break the rivets, to hide it in new society. (410)

English marriage is another form of fettering, one whose chains may be "wrenched asunder" but never entirely discarded. As the narrative that follows makes clear, it is this fact of marital law that is ultimately responsible for Oliver's vulnerable—and eventually quasi-chattel—status, both within and outside of the English welfare system.[154] While Oliver's father "found himself contracted, solemnly contracted" to his mother (411), bound by a wedding ring rather than the chains of paternal obligation, that contract is voided by his previous marriage. Throughout the novel, Dickens crafts a number of other, explicitly melodramatic, plot twists that would appear to intercede and contribute to Oliver's predicament: the stolen ring, the machinations of the novel's criminals, the indifference of the workhouse management. Yet the fact remains that it is the bondages of marriage's law that serve as the point of origin for all that follows (albeit aided by Monks, who returns from his position presumably within the West Indian apprenticeship system to make sure that Oliver's dispossession is carried out at home in England). Marriage laws turn Oliver's father into a slave—a condition that Oliver goes on to inherit from him, as the novel dramatizes. As we saw earlier, for writers like Burge, marriage and slavery are linked by the extension of the law into what were once considered purely private matters, transforming domestic slaves into freedmen and the anarchy of sexual choice into the bonds of Victorian marriage. In *Oliver Twist*, this link turns into an irony, as Dickens underscores the ways in which marital bondage shapes a social terrain in which a child can transform

[154] Kelly Hager makes a similar point in *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce*, 56-60.

from son to chattel and back simply by being moved into and out of the uneven legal and social terrains of early nineteenth-century England.[155] Whereas Burge turns to the law to suture together incommensurate social systems that are brought into contact through international and particularly imperial travel, Dickens draws attention to what he imagines to be the perils of such a project, suggesting that a legal system once endowed with the power to enslave has a strange way of deploying that power to constrict the lives of its own citizens.

Throughout *Dombey and Son*, as in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens's depictions of heterosexual marriage betray concerns not only about capitalist commodification, but also about the embrace of contractualism that enables transactional exchanges to pass for meaningful social relations. Long before Edith appears, Dombey watches his first wife's rapid decline following the birth of little Paul Dombey. While Dombey's first wife, like his second, is "a lady with no heart to give him," Dickens assures us that this was a matter of little concern to Dombey because "Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts" (12). This moment is meant to invite us into Dombey's consciousness, which is defined throughout the novel by its attention to commodity objects rather than (and often in confusion with) human emotion. Even more revealing, however, is the justification for his own indifference that Dombey goes on to offer: "Mr Dombey would have reasoned: That a matrimonial alliance with himself *must*, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honourable to any woman of common sense….That Mrs Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station, even without referent to the perpetuation of family firms: with her eyes fully open to the advantages….That Mrs

[155] Indeed, as Burge's text suggests, the case raised by Oliver's father might in fact have been more ambiguous than assumptions of Oliver's bastardy have implied. With his wife in France, a country that had legalized divorce in the late eighteenth century and would consider doing so again in the 1840s, geography and the unevenness of marriage's legal codification might once have rendered the marriage null. In an increasingly globalized world, however, the "fetters" of the domestic stretch far beyond the local context in which the marriage was first contracted, holding Oliver's father in its thrall even as his wife cavorts out of sight and, apparently, out of mind.

Dombey must have been happy" (13). Where capitalism substitutes commodified "hides" for connubial "hearts," contract reconstructs his wife's "broken spirit" as a knowing, willing, and above all "happy" partner to the Dombey marriage.

If Dombey's first marriage casts doubt upon the marriage contract's presumption of consent, reciprocity, and felicity, we might read the novel that follows (and Dombey's second marriage in particular) as an investigation into the reasons (both psychological and social) why matrimony's "social contract" proves so limited a form of social relation to Dickens. When Dombey interviews Paul's wet nurse, for example, he argues that the arrangement is a "mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting" (29). Surprisingly, Dombey deploys this language to emphasize not his ownership of Polly Toodle, but rather the ease with which their contracted arrangement can be dissolved. "It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that the child need become attached to you," Dickens assures her, and once she leaves, "The child will cease to remember you; and you will cease, if you please, to remember the child" (29). Dombey's fear is not Polly's return to the market, but the possibility that her presence within his home may create emotional bonds that the market will never sufficiently erase.

Like Polly Toodle, Edith poses a danger to the House of Dombey in the way in which her position blurs distinctions between hired subordinate and surrogate mother. As opposed to Paul's wet nurse, however, Edith's position is complicated by the fact that her marriage contract runs the additional risk of transforming her into a kind of familial property—a danger that Polly, a representative of the "free" working poor, never quite seems to run. When Edith invokes chattel slavery to describe her marriage, she appears to offer a critique of marriage's proximity to other kinds of financial transactions, dramatizing the ways in which the marriage contract, like the slave auction, effects the transformation of persons into non-persons, be they wives, slaves, or commodity objects. The transformative effects of the marriage contract are captured later in the novel by the

varied forms Edith's body takes following her marriage. Focalized through Dombey's objectifying gaze, Edith appears midway through the novel as a shifting form, assuming, alternately, the semblance of a luxury good, a wounded slave, and the defiant flesh of the autonomous female subject. As Dombey looks upon Edith, he sees,

> Chaplets of flowers, plumes of feathers, jewels, laces, silks and satins; look where he would, he saw riches, despised, poured out, and made of no account. The very diamonds—a marriage gift—that rose and fell impatiently upon her bosom, seemed to pant to break the chain that clasped them round her neck and roll down on the floor where she might tread upon them. (611-12)

In Dickens's description, Dombey stares at Edith's panting body but can only fixate upon the diamonds that encircle her neck like the collars that once encircled the necks of that other luxury item, the domestic slave. As Dickens's description locks into a close-up view of Edith's heaving, fragmented, and alluring breast and neck struggling starkly against the diamonds upon which Dombey remains fixated, he condenses into a single frame at least two different, doubled images: of Edith's body as both living flesh and luxury object, and of Edith herself as both wife and slave. At its worst, marriage brings home to England the uncanny spectacle of the human-turned-commodity regularly staged on the auction blocks of the slavery system. By conceiving of marriage as a "social contract," Dombey readily confuses marriage with other forms of financial and legal transaction, a confusion which leads to his seeming inability to distinguish his wives from the myriad other forms that the abrogation of personhood could take in the mid-nineteenth century.

In these passages, the relationship between the allurements of the wife's body, the painful flesh of the enslaved, and their subsumption within the distracting spectacle of the commodity object remains fundamentally a marker of Dombey's mercenary outlook—an outlook that tinges much of the novel, but that remains ostensibly distinct from preoccupations of many of the novel's other characters. As a result, we might read these scenes as a reflection upon the ways in which his devotion to capitalism limits his perception. Yet Edith's comparison of self to slave, and the

consequences that follow, invite us to read within *Dombey and Son* an unease directed not just towards contract's relation to market capitalism, but towards the myth of contract's reciprocal form itself—and with it, the nascent feminism of Edith's muted desire for a more flexible marriage between distinct, if not equal, subjects.

Following her declaration that she has been "hawked and vended" like a slave sold at auction, Edith proclaims, "He makes the purchase of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money, and I hope it may never disappoint him" (433). Ostensibly, Edith makes this pronouncement in order to deny that she has taken any part in forging the marriage contract that she is soon to enter into, but coming days before the marriage takes place, its effect is in fact quite the opposite, assuring us that Edith enters the contract, if not exactly willingly, then knowingly. Coming as it does before her marriage contract has been signed, this speech indicates not only the social pressures Edith suffers under, but also, and likely more significantly for Dickens, Edith's bad faith in entering into this marriage in the first place. Bad faith, however, also offers a powerful sign that Edith occupies a richer subject position than her claims of unwillingness, or, more accurately, will-lessness, imply. By announcing that she understands her marriage to be a kind of enslavement, Edith makes clear not only that she understands the corrupted contract to which she is a party, but also, by affirming this understanding, that her consent to that contract is legitimate. Her claim to enslavement thus becomes, paradoxically, a sign of her unwillingness to forfeit self-knowledge in the face of a demand to give up most other kinds of freedom in marriage. Sedgwick suggests that this scene represents a periperformative act, designed to weaken the force of Edith's later "I do" by placing that speech act in proximity to the slave auction. But the scene, and Edith's periperformative claims, also perform the inverse, weakening her claims to enslavement by revealing the hand that Edith has in binding herself to a bad marriage. By claiming herself as a slave,

Edith makes apparent the depths of her self and social knowledge, and with it, the subjective power animating her off-stage act of marital consent.

The problem Edith's narrative poses to the modern marriage contract is thus a problem not (or not only) of capitalist objectification, but also a problem of the subjectification that contract requires. In theory, the marriage contract is only binding if both parties can be said to have entered freely, knowingly, and of their own will. For critics like Wollstonecraft and Thompson, the subjection of women rested upon the notion that in denying women education and in constricting their lives to the pursuit of pleasure, it is impossible to treat their entrance into the marriage contract as knowing or truly consensual.[156] For Dickens, however, Edith's claims of enslavement betray a pursuit of pleasure of another kind, revealing both the knowledge that animates her act of conjugal choice and establishes that choice as, in some sense, self-interested, even if that interest is radically constrained by social conditions. In her attempts to claim slavery before her marriage has begun, Edith attempts to invert the progress of coverture, claiming the attenuated status of the slave *before* her marriage, the better to preserve, for herself as well as for Dickens's readers, claims to autonomous judgment, self-identification, and critique that will persist *afterwards*. Marriage may change Edith's status, but this speech lodges a protest against the notion that it could ever dispossess her of the knowledge of both herself and of the world that renders her initial critique of marriage so forceful.

Though in these early scenes, Edith's tenacious insistence upon her intellectual, if not legal or bodily, autonomy leads her to declare matrimony an act of enslavement, later in the novel, we

[156] Marcus offers a more detailed discussion of this point, explaining "When feminists argued that marriage should become more contractual, they understood contract in terms of the *social* contract, as a voluntary agreement between equals that either party could terminate. Feminists argued that marriage was not yet truly contractual, because in marrying under English law, women gave away equality (wives were not equal to husbands), autonomy (wives were absorbed into their husband's legal personality), and freedom (wives could obtain a divorce only under very limited conditions)" (*Between Women*, 215).

discover that Edith, too, holds out hopes for a more equitable interpretation of marriage's contractual form. Months after their wedding, Edith attempts to re-stage a swearing of vows, this time in good faith: "If you promise to forbear on your part, I will promise to forbear on mine. We are a most unhappy pair, in whom, from different causes, every sentiment that blesses marriage, or justifies it, is rooted out; but in the course of time, some friendship, or some fitness for each other, may arise between us" (617). By offering a vow of mutual forbearance, and a reframing of their marriage as a compact of "friendship," Edith attempts to rewrite their corrupted bargain of sale as a contractual agreement between equals, invoking the nascent argument made by advocates of what Dickens calls the "Rights of Women" (917) that marriage could look to contractualism as an ideal as much as an instrument of coercion.

This agreement seems impossible, however, and not only because of Dombey's immovability. For Dickens, it seems, marriage becomes most confining when it encompasses two subjects, two separate wills, rather than one. While Edith's confusion with inanimate objects indicates the way in which the logic of commodification permeates Dombey's very mode of perception, Dickens suggests that the true problem with the Dombey marriage is less that it turns Edith into an object, but rather that it does so only partially. Dickens writes,

> They never could have led a happy life together; but nothing could have made it more unhappy, than the willful and determined warfare of such elements. His pride was set upon maintaining his magnificent supremacy, and forcing recognition from her. She would have been racked to death, and turned but her haughty glance of claim inflexible disdain upon him, to the last. Such recognition from Edith! He little knew through what a storm and struggle she had been driven onward to the crowning honour of his hand. He little knew how much she thought she had conceded, when she suffered him to call her wife. (610)

Where Edith sees self-negation, Dombey sees the traces of a recalcitrant subjectivity that refuses to accord him recognition. Under these conditions, Dickens suggests, the reciprocity that Edith claims to desire seems to give way, almost inevitably, to a demand either for a lopsided recognition, or for the negation of one person into proprietary object. In one sense, Edith and Dombey represent the

closest thing to a true contract between autonomous subjects in the novel, as they alone possess the knowledge of self, world, and of marriage itself required to "knowingly consent" to marriage's bonds. By depicting Dombey and Edith locked into a Hegelian struggle for recognition, however, Dickens suggests that the reciprocity that a marriage modeled on contractualism promises is fundamentally undesirable precisely because it preserves the specter of two, naturally warring subjects, rather than facilitating the orderly subordination of one to another; the result, Dickens suggests, is that two subjects bound in marriage will forever pull each other apart, and that the laws that bind the couple together will come to seem, in response, like a "manacle" forcing together the "fettered hands" of its subjects (699).

When Edith finally chooses to flee the House of Dombey, she thus fulfills the dictates of the narrative that she sets for herself in the days leading up to her marriage. Her escape assimilates her story to the fugitive slave plot, as she moves from captive to commodity to, finally, a fugitivity that dramatically enacts her claims to free will while ensuring her exile both from England and from the domesticity of the novel. In doing so, Edith's fugitivity affirms the autonomous subjectivity that she laid claim to from the moment she first declared herself a "slave." In this way, Edith's plot mirrors the chattel slave/freedman dyad that Stowell describes in his account of *Somerset*. For Stowell, freedom can only come about through a violent assertion of free will in response to the violation represented by slavery's "irons." In the movement from violation to violent overcoming, the freedman asserts a self-reliant individuality that justifies his freedom from slavery. For Edith, likewise, marriage constitutes a form of fettering because it constrains her autonomous subjectivity. Though her dramatic escape declares that autonomy to her husband and the novel's other characters, for readers of the novel, it only serves to confirm what Edith's claims of slavery already asserted: that her sharply-defined individuality rendered marriage an intolerable constraint. Edith's self-identification as a "slave" and her fugitive escape do not, therefore, indicate a shift in Edith's

character, but rather work together to define her position as a modern, individuated subject in a novel in which that status is only granted to some of its characters.

While readers of the novel have identified Edith's individuation and her social protest as a form of feminism, however, for Dickens, they represent the limitations of contractualism, and with it, feminist reconceptions of contractual marriage as an ideal. For Dickens, such contracts present a paradox, insofar as they require their participants to be at once radically individuated and, at the same time, bound to others. While writers like Wollstonecraft and Mill envisioned precisely this mode of reciprocal relation as a feminist ideal that balances individual autonomy with romantic sociability, Dickens reframes this ideal as an irresolvable conflict between the freedom of the fugitive and the subjection of the self-conscious slave. For Dickens, it seems, such a conflict is inevitable because modern contracts (like the one Dombey attempts—and fails—to form with Polly Toodle) necessarily evacuate forms of feeling such as affection, familiarity, or personal care from social relations. In doing so, Dickens thus misreads, or fails to engage with, the complexities of the contractual marriage ideal that he critiques. If he finds himself unable to reconcile individual freedom and familial affection, however, I want to suggest that it might be in part because those very feelings of familiarity, pleasure, and personal attachment had come to be synonymous with domestic slavery in the decades preceding *Dombey and Son*'s publication.

"The Old, Old Fashion": The Domestic Slaves of *Dombey and Son*

If the marriage between Edith and Dombey reveals Dickens's ambivalence towards "enslaving" effects of a liberal culture suffering what Steven Marcus in his classic account refers to as the "death of feeling," then we might expect the novel's other plots to provide a solution to, or at minimum an escape from, the world of slaves, masters, and fugitive free that Edith and Dombey inhabit.[157] And, indeed, if what Dombey lacks is "heart," the novel's other characters—Walter and

[157] Steven Marcus, *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1965), 344.

Florence, Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle, and above all little Paul Dombey—offer that quality in spades. At its emotional climax, the novel offers what Marcus describes as a theology, embodied by Florence, of "female *caritas*—suffering all and enduring all—the expression of both a hope and a despair," turning the motif of feeling's death into a meditation upon feeling's redemptive powers in the face of the "metaphysical and moral disease" of "middle-class culture."[158]

Yet one of the novel's pleasures is Dickens's loving portrayal of the milder, and more eccentric, expressions of emotion routinely traded among the novel's predominately male characters. Uncle Sol's affection for Walter, Captain Cuttle's affections for Sol, and Paul Dombey's affection for just about everyone provide a kind of relief from the sensational pitch of Edith's marriage to Dombey and the traumatic agony that Florence suffers, interspersing this moodier drama with scenes that mix delight in these characters' peculiarities with a lingering sense of melancholy (a melancholy that proves justified when Walter and Paul are lost to the novel in nearly a single stroke at the end of chapter twenty six). Part of these characters' attraction in fact lies in the relatively unassuming nature of their preoccupations. Compared to the modern anxieties that seem to overrun every inch of the House of Dombey, the shop of the Ships' Instruments Maker and the short life of little Paul seem not just "old fashioned," as the novel's other characters persistently claim, but also quotidian, quaint. Taken together, these characters represent an idealized domesticity with its own distinct temporal rhythms (habit, custom, continuity) and feelings (familiarity, affection, and indebtedness). Rather than consign these concerns exclusively to the closures of the sentimental alone, however, I want to argue that they in fact serve to delineate a specific response to a British history of domestic slavery and its relationship to the kinds of domestic utopias that these

[158] Ibid., 355, 329.

characters, taken together, inhabit.[159] In contrast to Edith's narrative, which frames modern, chattel slavery as a contaminant poised to destroy the Victorian home, these subplots gesture towards a (largely past-oriented) universe in which domestic slavery forms the very atmosphere in which these quotidian experiences are practiced and passed on to the realist novel. In contrast to Edith's narrative, which presents chattel slavery largely as a critical trope, I will argue that in the novel's other plots, slavery becomes an object of attention and, at times, of a conflicted affection, as a memory that Dickens wants to elegize even as he attempts to erase it. To be sure, the notion that domestic slaves could come to seem like cherished objects represents a type of sentimental thinking that obscures and at times romanticizes slavery's violence. At the same time, by shedding light upon these feelings, perceptions, and everyday habits, I argue that the novel at times transcends its own sentimental position, to offer a more nuanced reflection upon what it feels like to look back upon slavery's history and see in it a reflection of one's most cherished relationships.

The peculiar forms of feeling that characterize the specifically British legacy of slavery for Dickens find their most exaggerated embodiment in the figure of Paul Dombey. Part of a lineage of Dickensian characters that might also include Oliver Twist, Little Nell and Little Dorrit, little Paul Dombey at first appears to be defined by his diminutive size, his gentle spirit, and his perceived fragility—in other words, by his "cuteness." Considered within this line of characters, we in fact might consider Paul significant precisely because he marks a kind of turning point in the development of the Dickensian adorable. In his lecture on Little Nell, Adorno argues that the child represents Dickens's distinctive commitment to a "prebourgeois" style of characterization in which "the individual has not yet reached full autonomy…but instead is presented as the bearer of

[159] For a discussion of "domestic utopias" formed around the affects of habit, familiarity, continuity I discuss here, see Ann Cvetkovich, "The Utopia of Ordinary Habit: Crafting, Creativity, and Spiritual Practice," in *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), eDuke Books e-book, 154-202.

objective factors, a dark, obscure fate, and a starlike consolation that overtake the individual."[160] In contrast to the bourgeois or liberal subject, defined in part by his capacity to possess objects, these characters are defined by the way in which the object world grasps hold of them, and turns them into allegorical illustrations or objects rather than psychologically-complex subjectivities. Similarly, Paul finds himself defined as much by the material qualities of his fragile, embodied form as by his outsized and eccentric emotionality. Though Dombey protests that his son is not a "living skeleton," Dickens implies that his subjectivity is constrained by its material form, as he finds that "Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles a stone wall to him" (107).

Unlike Nell's allegorical status and Oliver's cypher-like quality (a quality that makes him available as the object of theft and repossession throughout *Oliver Twist*), in *Dombey*, Dickens transforms Paul's resemblance to objects (and household objects in particular) into the grounds for a unique subjective perspective. While Paul struggles to cram from his school books, he finds solace not in his fellow students, but instead in the everyday objects that surround him: "He was intimate with all the paper-hanging in the house; saw things that no one else saw in the patterns; found out miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls, and squinting faces leering in the squares and diamonds of the floorcloth" (190). In contrast to the object-like quality of Nell's figuration or Oliver's frequent lapses into blankness or unconsciousness, Paul's proximity to objects represents an intimacy with the variegated objects that comprise the Victorian house (and the realist novel), characteristic less of a pre-realistic perspective than a "surrealistic" or perhaps hyperrealist one that perceives a dynamic social world embedded in those lifeless objects.[161]

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[160] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*: A Lecture," *Notes to Literature*, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 171.

[161] In her reading of these scenes in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, Amanda Anderson similarly describes Paul's consciousness as a form of "early modernism": "To render Paul's 'old-fashioned' character, Dickens employs an altogether new-fashioned 'stream of consciousness' narration. The literary term, which we associate with early modernism, is oddly appropriate here, since Dickens

Paul's perception of and response to these household objects is significant because it exemplifies a competing aesthetic interwoven with but distinct from Edith's sensational objectification—a difference Dickens encapsulates in his description of Edith's very different response to wallpaper: "The mimic roses on the walls and floors were set round with sharp thorns, that tore her breast; in every scrap of gold so dazzling to the eye, she saw some hateful atom of her purchase-money" (462). Where Edith's psychological projections reflect her painful self-awareness, Paul's apprehension of the novel's stuff seems instead refract back onto his character a sense of his own status as a curiosity, as adorable and odd as the tiny, exotic animals he imaginatively curates inside of the walls. But whereas Edith's resemblance to household objects allegorizes her position as a "chattel slave" within the novel, Paul's proximity to, and intimate relationships with, objects dramatizes an "old fashioned" form of object relations that trades the narcissism of private property that Dombey exemplifies for a more affectionate or intimate relation between owner and object—a relation that resembles domestic slavery's confusion of attachment and ownership.

Paul embodies an aesthetics of the adorable that is clearly related to both a Victorian sentimental culture and a Dickensian obsession with the eccentric curator (Krook's rag and bottle shop) and the moody animism of objects (Marley's face in the doorknob, the fog that hangs like a character over *Bleak House*), yet distinct from both. Accounts of cuteness tend to emphasize the ways in which the cute object offers an appeal for protection or care that inspires "tender feelings" in its audiences. Sianne Ngai distinguishes the cute from the beautiful by arguing that the former belongs to an aesthetic of "minor," "milder or equivocal feelings" associated with the everyday as

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represents that stream, to adopt the imagery of the novel, only as it ebbs out to sea" (88). For Anderson, this "modernist" consciousness represents the "intimate acts of the imagination" by which Paul "shields himself from becoming a mere instance of the family and firm, a means to an end" (88). By contrast, however, I read these scenes as underscoring Paul's own similarity to the objects of the novel, rather than developing a strongly individuated or privatized mode of self-consciousness, as Anderson seems to imply.

opposed to the exalted and exceptional categories of the beautiful or the sublime.[162] Like the sentimental object, the cute object is unusually responsive, inspiring both sympathy and aversion; unlike the sentimental, however, cuteness, Ngai argues, makes a virtue of powerlessness, displaying a marked capacity for aggression that uncovers the proximity of the "cute" to the "acuteness" of the alert or critical subject.[163] In her recent discussion of Dickens's "little women," Lauren Byler reads cuteness as an aesthetic that betrays Dickens's own passive-aggressive tendencies, aligning him with characters like Little Nell and Little Dorrit whose persistence in self-negation becomes a kind of imposition upon the will and desire of those around them.[164] With these frameworks in mind, I would argue that *Dombey and Son* surely represents another of Dickens's forays into the arena of the adorable, most notably in the figure of Florence, whose own aggressive self-abnegation I will return to. In marked contrast to these accounts, however, *Dombey and Son* is also characterized by an aesthetic and affective interest in markedly *male* (if not necessarily masculine) feelings of the cute or the quaint. For these male characters, I argue, the duality of power/powerlessness found in the "minor affections" of the adorable represents domestic slavery's impact upon family relations.

While Paul Dombey's relationship to the novel's household objects exemplifies Dickens's particular interest in moments when male characters find themselves caught up in domestic affections bordering on the quaint, the cute, and the eccentric, those feelings really only come into historical focus in relation to the male domesticity shared by Sol Gills and Walter Gay. Like Paul, Sol Gills is defined by his "old fashion," and like Paul, this fashion is defined by a love of the precious objects stuffed to the gills inside of his shop: "Such extraordinary precautions were taken in every

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[162] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 58.

[163] Ibid., 87

[164] Lauren Byler, "Dickens's Little Women; or, Cute as the Dickens," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41 (2013): 219-50, JStor.

instance to save room, and keep the thing compact; and so much practical navigation was fitted, and cushioned, and screwed, into every box (whether the box was a mere slab, as some were, or something between a cocked hat and a star-fish, as others were, and those quite mild and modest boxes as compared with others) that the shop itself…seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern" (47). Sol's home is packed with objects that, like Paul himself, are diminutive, out of date, and fragile, "jammed into the tightest cases, fitted into the narrowest corners, fenced up behind the most impertinent cushions, and screwed into the acutest angles, to prevent its philosophical composure from being disturbed by the rolling of the sea" (47). While Paul's affectionate feelings prepare him for the metaphorical "sea" of a religious afterlife, however, the home that Sol fills with cherished objects is a home prepared for travel across the real waters of the sea that separates England from the East and West Indies to which his former career as a sailor once took him.

Sol's position as the eccentric but loving guardian of the Ships' Instruments shop and of Walter Gay seem designed to encourage readers of the novel to interpret his role in the very slavery system that Dickens, in Edith's narrative, denounces as another form of the "old fashion," rather than a sign of culpability. I want to suggest, however, that Sol deserves closer attention precisely because his affection for Walter appears, at moments, inflected by what Dickens implies are habits forged through his participation in the trade. As Walter breaks the news of his impending departure for Barbados to Cuttle, the two characters discuss Sol's anticipated reaction:

> 'He is old, Captain Cuttle; and besides, his life is a life of custom—'
> 'Steady, Wal'r! Of a want of custom?' said the Captain, suddenly reappearing.
> 'Too true,' returned Walter, shaking his head; 'but I meant a life of habit, Captain Cuttle—that sort of custom. And if (as you very truly said, I am sure) he would have died sooner for the loss of the stock, and all those objects to which he has been accustomed for so many years, don't you think he might die a little soon for the loss of—'
> 'Of his Nevy,' interposed the Captain, 'Right!' (235)

In suggesting that Sol conflates his nephew with the familiar "stock" that he hoards inside his shop, Walter and Cuttle betray the ways in which Sol's perception of his family has been shaped by slavery's proprietary logic. In contrast to Dombey's desire for commodity objects, however, Dickens suggests that Sol's affection for his "stock" is born not of pride or acquisitiveness, and certainly not of the capitalist modernity to which Dombey belongs, but of seemingly more anodyne causes such as habit and familiarity. As I suggested earlier, however, familiarity and habituation became an important marker of the relationship between British citizens and domestic slaves in cases like the *Adelaide* decision, where jurists determined slaves' status through evidence of the duration of the relationship between slaveholders and slaves, rather than appeal to notions of financial or political "right." In Dickens's rendering, these feelings return to tie the bonds of familial "stock" to Walter's status as collateral. While Sol's mode of perception—and his possessive understanding of familial care—clearly echoes Dombey's proprietorial desires, Dickens seems to suggest here that Sol's conflation of family and financial "stock" is also distinct because that conflation represents not a desire to transform person into property, but rather the ways in which the memory of other forms of property ownership and self-identity linger on and shape his experience of paternal affection.

Put another way, Sol's affection for Walter expands the function of "slavery" in the novel in two related ways. First, their relationship appears to resonate with the practice of domestic slavery and its interpretation, in the law, as a relation defined and legitimated by its mild but durable mode of intimacy. Unlike conventional chattel slavery, which tends to be understood within a framework of extreme sensations—of violence and pain, but also of unbounded sexual desire and possession—domestic slavery offers a fictive reframing of the slavery relation founded upon familiarity and temporal duration. Understanding slavery in these terms might allow us to perceive its influence upon realist texts that seem to conform neither to sensational narratives of domination and liberation, nor to sentimental narratives of physical pain and tearful catharsis that we have come to

associate with slave narratives and abolitionist fiction, respectively, but that, like the story of Walter and Uncle Sol, center around the more contained pleasures of domestic contentment. Second, and more specific to *Dombey*, we might read Sol's affections for Walter, and the feelings of comfort and loss they provoke, as a reflection upon the mixed feelings provoked by slavery's memory in the early Victorian era. Defined by temporalities of the past and its fading repetition in the present, Sol therefore represents not just the history of the slave trade, but also its historical memory—a memory that Dickens gently mocks, but also represents as an experience defined by a tender nostalgia that stands in contrast to slavery's haunting presence inside the House of Dombey. Compare, for instance, Walter's description of Sol's gradual acculturation to the possession of his "stock" to Dickens's description of the ties that binds Dombey and Edith: "Ill-assorted couple, unhappy in themselves and in each other, bound together by no tie but the manacle that joined their fettered hands, and straining that so harshly, in their shrinking asunder, that it wore and chafed to the bone, Time, consoler of affliction and softener of anger, could do nothing to help them" (699). In contrast to Dombey and Edith's seeming immunity to a familiarity born of time, Sol's tender affections come to seem like a metaphor for the softening effects of history itself—a surprising turn for a novel that has so often been read as one of the Victorian period's most direct treatments of British colonial history.

What, then, are we to make of the temporal and tonal differences in the ways Dickens treats the experience of domestic possession and its relationship to slavery across the novel? The relationship between Sol and Walter is significant because it challenges the way in which the novel's tonal dualism, its movement between the sensationalism of the bad marriage plot and the sentimentality of the dying child, and, eventually, the satisfactions of the good marriage plot, have most often been conceived, with the latter posing as a retreat from the social critique that the former so vividly advances. Rather, I want to suggest that Dickens introduces this relationship—and links it

quite specifically to the phenomenon of domestic slavery—in part to interrogate the limits involved in viewing an English past symbolized by sentimental feeling and the durable bonds of family inheritance as a solution to the problems of industrial capitalism and modern contractualism that Dickens raises in the Edith narrative. While familial love and domestic care offer compelling alternatives to the alienations of the modern world, Dickens suggest that those feelings are *also* an enslavement of a kind. Slavery thus arises as a janus-faced phenomenon in the novel, at once a relic of the past and a harbinger of the future, insofar as that future remains shaped by slavery's economic, legal, and emotional history.

Indeed, one of the most significant (and Dickensian) features of the novel is the way in which Dickens suggests that the most cherished relations always risk revealing an underlying web of obligation and indebtedness. Early in the novel, Dickens reveals that Sol's guardianship over his adoptive ward, the model for domestic care in the novel, is in fact underwritten not only by the pair's blood relation but also by the bonds of debt. When a banker appears early in the novel to repossess Sol's shop for an unpaid debt, Sol reveals that the debt is "a matter of security for Wally's father—an old bond" (142). Ironically, Sol claims that he cannot repay the debt because his money has been lost to bad investments he has made on Walter's behalf: "I have been trying to do something with it for Wally, and I'm old-fashioned, and behind the time. It's here and there, and—and in short, it's as good as nowhere" (142). In truth, this debt reveals that Walter's position within Sol's home is not only that of an adopted ward but also of a kind of debtor—one whose obligations goes unstated. When Walter accepts a post in Barbados with the House of Dombey, his act of heroic self-sacrifice might be read, alternately, as a form of repayment and an opportunity to clear his debt, if only in the eyes of the novel's readers.

This was the reading offered by the novel's first stage adaptation. Written by John Brougham and first performed in New York in 1848, the play suggests that at least American audiences were

even more struck by its myriad portrayals of New World slavery than modern critics perhaps have been.[165] Distilling the novel down to three acts, the play centers with perhaps surprising emphasis around a perceived parallel between Walter Gay and Edith Dombey, linked together by their enslavement at the hands of family members (Uncle Sol in the case of Walter, her mother Cleopatra in the case of Edith). Unlike the novel, the play opens on Sol Gil's Instrument Shop, where Sol laments to Walter that "I've sold you into slavery, haven't I?", a declaration that comes to seem prophetic when Walter, in the third scene, accepts Dombey's offer to take a position in Barbados.[166] While the entire play seems tailored to transform Dickens's novel into a story about American slavery, its emphasis upon Walter's debt and its "enslaving" consequences underscores an oft-overlooked aspect of Walter and Sol's appealing domesticity—namely, that their loving bonds grow up around a bondage of debt, a bondage portrayed as akin to the debt of gratitude imagined to help hold the domestic slave in thrall to the slaveholder.[167]

In this way, we might see the relationship between Walter and Sol as a forerunner to the relationship between Pip and Magwitch that has more often been read in relation to slavery: in the same way that Pip comes to see Magwitch's financial aid as a criminal and, eventually, enslaving bond, the relationship between Walter and Sol exemplifies the ways in which, for Dickens, paternal

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[165] John Brougham, *Dombey and Son*, *Brougham's Dramatic Work; Consisting of a Collection of Dramas, Comedies and Farces, by John Brougham. Selected from French's American Drama*, Volume 1 (New York: Samuel French, 1856), 1-31. Information about the performance of Brougham's drama comes from "The Vault at Pfaff's: An Archive of Art and Literature by the Bohemians of Antebellum New York," Edward Whitley, Lehigh University, http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/pfaffs/w1586/, accessed April 22, 2016, in an entry for S. J. Adair Fitz-Gerald's book *Dickens and the Drama* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1910).

[166] Brougham, *Dombey and Son*, 4.

[167] Brougham, for example, extends Susan Nipper's sardonic declaration, "I'm very much beholden to you, Mrs. Richards…and really feel it as a honour to receive your commands, being a black slave and a mulotter" (Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, 66) to the even more indignant pronouncement, made in the hybrid dialect of an English governess and a white American Southerner: "I shan't do no such thing! You ain't my missus, nor yet my master, thanks be, seeing as I'm not a black slave or a mulotto!" (15). Likewise, he grants the Native speaking lines in minstrel dialect.

care so often becomes overlaid with feelings of debt, gratitude, and obligation, as economic support creates psychic bonds that can feel simultaneously affectionate and freighted with constraints upon the characters' freedoms.[168] When, for example, Walter secures the release of his uncle's debts, Dickens notes that Walter,

> was overjoyed to purge the old man's hearth from bailiffs and brokers, and to hurry back to his uncle with the good tidings. He was overjoyed…to sit down at evening in the little back parlor with old Sol and Captain Cuttle; and to see the instrument-maker already reviving, and hopeful for the future, and feeling that the wooden midshipman was his own again. But without the least impeachment of his gratitude to Mr Dombey, it must be confessed that Walter was humbled and cast down. It is when our budding hopes are nipped beyond recovery by some rough wind, that we are the most disposed to picture to ourselves what flowers they might have borne, if they had flourished…" (155)

In his mingled joy at this imagined domestic scene and his downcast shame, we can perhaps discern Walter's confrontation with the similarly mingled bonds of affection and indebtedness that define his relation to Sol early in the novel. In contrast to *Great Expectations*, where these economic and psychic debts leads directly to the circle of crime and criminal guilt that define Pip's conscience, in *Dombey and Son*, these debts instead help secure the very bonds of kinship, and "old fashioned" domesticity that the novel seems elsewhere to valorize as an alternative to the chattel system. Superseding the blood ties that bind Walter to Sol, this matrix of debt, obligation, and affection replaces biology with immaterial bonds, turning Walter into a kind of domestic slave. Though Dickens at times takes up racial difference as a marker of status in the novel (most notably in the jarring violence perpetrated against the Native), he seems to suggest that what defines slavery instead is the intimate or "soft" form that domination takes. For Dickens, it is precisely this mode of care—by turns comforting and shaming—that makes slavery so essential to understanding both the appeal and the aggression of the Victorian family. Walter belongs to Sol's "stock," yet we are led to believe

[168] For a reading of slavery in *Great Expectations*, see, for example, Lee, "Fugitive Plots in *Great Expectations*," *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel*, 113-130.

that this is what makes their relation an affectionate one—what makes them, in other words, like family.

The object of affection, the bearer of a debt, the embodiment of loyal gratitude, and, ultimately, the child inducted, through a complex series of emotional and economic negotiations, into the West Indian trade, Walt thus emerges as the novel's "domestic slave," in the more specific terms offered by the early nineteenth-century British slave trade. Sent to what Dombey and the novel's other characters assume will be his death in Barbados (a place where, in the novel's imagination, "a knowledge of black slavery" might still be a necessity of the job (291)) aboard a ship named the "Son and Heir," Walter mirrors Paul's position as the beloved and privileged "son and heir" of the Dombey firm whose death (which likewise sends him out to sea) represents a symbolic sacrifice to all of the cruelty and self-interest that defines Dombey's familial love. Thrust outside of the "modern world," where legal and financial abstractions reign and are met with equally intellectual modes of self-consciousness and social critique, Walter and Paul together discover that the love of a family member can just as easily consign them to the depths. Unlike Paul, however, Walter survives, restoring the cozy protection of Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle, preserving the relationship between Walter and Sol as a fortuitous one, and transforming Walter's shipwreck and rescue into the instrument of his fantastic escape not only from death but also from the economic and psychic bondage that once hung over him.

In contrast to Edith, then, Walter's domestic slavery ties him more firmly to the realities of the British trade and, at the same time, produces a much more ambivalent sense of the legacy that reality imparts to Walter's narrative. As the focus of Walter's narrative shifts away from his relationship with Sol towards his marriage to Florence, that narrative invites comparisons to the historical trajectory that domestic slavery followed as it transformed from a relation which reflected an intimacy, akin to villeinage, upon which the collusion between economic and family ties are built,

towards a relation that mirrored and modeled an ideal form of heterosexual intimacy enshrined in the novel's more felicitous marriage plots. By the novel's end, the trope of domestic slavery comes to refer much more pointedly to the bondage shared between husbands and wives, rather than to the broader range of kinships with which the novel's earlier scenes are concerned. As the novel's conclusion turns to focus, as the title of chapter sixty suggests, on matters "Chiefly Matrimonial," its earlier, and more wide-ranging interest in slavery and family resolves into a determination to answer the question that hangs over the ill-fated marriage between Edith and Dombey: can marriage exist outside of the "House of Bondage"?

The marriages—good and bad—with which the novel concludes point towards a decisive no. Replaying Edith's protestations, Dickens depicts the marriage between Bunsby and Mrs. MacStinger, two of the novel's minor characters, as yet another fugitive slave plot, this time rendered as a cross-gender farce:

> 'Jack Bunsby,' whispered the Captain, 'do you do this here, o' your own free will?'
> Mr. Bunsby answered, 'No.'
> …
> 'Sheer off' said the Captain.
> 'Where's the good?' retorted the forlorn sage. 'She'd capter me agen.'
> …
> 'Bunsby!' urged the Captain, 'it's for liberty; will you three times? Now or never!'
> Bunsby didn't then, and didn't ever; for Mrs MacStinger immediately afterwards married him. (925)

The tone has changed, but its import is the same: declaring that marriage is a form of slavery serves as a rhetorical gesture—the gesture of the "philosopher," as the Captain refers to Bunsby—that reaffirms self-consciousness by protesting that one lacks free will. Bunsby's "forlorn" claims of capture underscore the ways in which the performativity of marriage almost effortlessly absorbs the performance of marital misery, which becomes both an affirmation of knowing consent—a part of the performance of the marriage itself—and a way of preserving, through its negation, a trace of the personal autonomy that a more atomized modernity desires even within marriage. That Dickens

turns this proposition into comedic fare only reinforces our sense that Dickens intends Edith's protests to read to some extent as ironic, in that they ultimately help strengthen marriage's enactment as much as they lodge a protest against it. The comedic repetition of those protests thus betrays Dickens's skepticism both towards Edith's feminist complaint and towards her use of abolitionist rhetoric as a discourse of social critique, amplifying the contradictions inherent to Edith's narrative itself.

The question that remains, then, is whether the novel's marital ideal—the marriage between Walter and Florence—loosens slavery's hold over the family or embodies its warmest embrace. Captain Cuttle—who from the novel's opening misread Walter's indebtedness to Dombey as a sign that his future as an heir to the House was secure—adopts the novel's preference for defining marriage on slavery's terms, happily announcing shortly after Walter's return that "Wal'r and sweetheart will be jined together in the house of bondage, as soon as the askings is over" (847). Picking up on the novel's various attempts to turn Edith's indictment of marital slavery into the stuff of farce, Cuttle's remarks nonetheless alert us to Dickens's interest in locating a point at which connubial happiness might intercept and transform the apparent inescapable fact that marriage is founded upon slavery's fictive kinships.

In the novel's conclusion, Dickens depicts this happier bondage as one which manages both to negate slavery's legacy and to absorb it: the happy marriage is reimagined as slavery's sublation. Following Walter's marriage to Florence, Dickens turns once again to the questions of indebtedness and affection that animate the novel's earlier scenes inside the Ships' Instruments Shop, redistributing those terms to describe their marital bliss. Dickens frames Florence and Walter's final lovemaking scene as a dialogue about their indebtedness to one another. Florence begins:

> 'I have been thinking what a charge I am to you.'
> 'A precious, sacred, charge, dear heart! Why *I* think that sometimes.'
> 'You are laughing, Walter. I know that's much more in your thoughts than mine. But I mean a cost.'

> 'A cost, my own?'
> 'In money, dear. All these preparations that Susan and I are so busy with—I have been able to purchase very little for myself. You were poor before. But how much poorer I shall make you, Walter!'
> 'And how much richer, Florence!' (852)

The circularity of their dialogue again insists that there is something funny going on inside their marital arrangement—something laughable, not unlike Bunsby's lamentable marriage to Mrs. MacStinger, but also something paradoxical, insofar as marital happiness seems to demand that its participants recalibrate loss as gain, expense as a gift. In a sense, the dialogue reaffirms the comparisons between marriage and slavery that form the center of Edith's narrative, by admitting that good marriages as much as bad are organized through economies of possession and indebtedness. While Florence attempts to talk economics, Walter deliberately misinterprets those economies in affective terms (itself a canny deflection of Captain Cuttle's amiably mercenary designs on Florence made on Walter's behalf earlier in the novel). Like the dialogue between Bunsby and Captain Cuttle, this moment thus rebukes Edith's comparisons of marriage to slavery not by denying the social, economic, and legal conditions these two social relations share, but by arguing that the thrust of those connections is largely a question of interpretation or tone. Edith, Bunsby, and Florence share slavery's rhetoric, but only in Edith's case does that rhetoric become a scandal or a tragedy. By embracing slavery as a signifier for emotional obligation (obligation that, in typical Dickensian form, cannot help but be wedded to financial concerns), Dickens suggests that Walter's earlier experience of "domestic slavery" really does prove instructive as a model for domestic contentment, as that experience continues to define the language of love as a form of taking stock of one's affections. The solution to marriage's kinship to slavery is to be found, Dickens suggests, not in the reciprocity of the social contract but in an embrace of a slavery that is contiguous to but preserved from the material reality of economic and corporeal violence that defines the chattel condition—in other words, by idealizing a return to domestic slavery's fiction of emotional bondage.

It is not enough for Dickens, however, to imagine that the good marriage simply absorbs the terms that slavery—and, by extension the bad marriage—sets. Rather, Florence concludes the dialogue with an explicit negation of slavery's terms. When Florence claims that she has brought "nothing—nothing!" to their marriage, Walter asks, "And you dear Florence? are you nothing?" (853). She responds:

> No, nothing, Walter. Nothing but your wife…I am nothing more, that is not you. I have no earthly hope any more, that is not you. I have nothing dear to me any more, that is not you. (853)

Florence's protestation can be read not only as a declarative self-abnegation, but also as a pointed negation of the terms of profit and cost with which Dickens frames their romance. We might read Florence's declaration not just as a claim that she is "nothing," but as a claim that she is *no thing*—a thing no longer. Simultaneously a possession and a debt, the doubled character of her position with respect to Walter ultimately serves, like figures in a balance ledger, to cancel one another out, leaving a marriage freed of the things, the objects of affection, whose loss and gain work, throughout the novel, to thrust every domestic relationship under slavery's shadow.

In this reading, Dickens valorizes coverture—the dissolution of the legal, social, and corporeal personality of the wife and its incorporation into the husband—as a *solution* to the problems slavery poses, as it dissolves the objects that lie at the center of every form of domesticity, modern and old fashioned, heterosexual and homosocial, that the novel takes up. The passage's repeated double negatives perform, syntactically, the work of coverture, dissolving, over and over again, her "I" first into nothing, and then into Walter's conclusive "you": "I am nothing more, that is not you," works, through a double negative (nothing/not) to shift the balance of attention from Florence to Walter. More importantly, their chiastic structure implies that, like Florence, Walter undergoes a negation of a kind—one which presumably unknots the formerly indebted, and thus thingly quality of his relations—both to his family and to Florence's father—but leaves in its wake a

new subject, a thrice-interpolated "you." In this way, Dickens returns to both the "I do" of speech act theory that "does things with words," and the more specific "I do" found in theories of performativity (including Sedgwick's) that uses those words to make persons into things, to offer in its stead a vision of marriage as exceptional because it represents the *undoing* of things, dissolving the problem of possession in a way that separation, fugitivity, and loss each failed to do. Marriage may, as readers such as Nunokawa and Sedgwick have argued, threaten to turn persons into things. But in this scene, marriage's power lies in its putative ability to untie the bonds of familial possession, dissolving wifely "things" into the person of the husband.

To say that the solution Dickens poses here represents an affront to Edith's desire for subjective autonomy, if not "women's rights," would be an understatement, but then it has perhaps been evident all along that Dickens's turns towards Florence's fugitivity and her rescue in marriage serves to express his ambivalence towards, if not explicit curtailment of Edith's explicitly feminist aims. More surprising, I think, is that challenging Edith's claims seems to require yet another incantation of the slavery-marriage trope and its subsumption into the image of the good marriage. In Burge's reading, the security of marital status depends upon the fiction that the distinctions between married and unmarried are both as clear and as all-consuming as the distinctions between freedom and emancipation; the rights of the husband in England are built upon the protection of free status granted to enslaved men who reach England's shores. In his depiction of Walter's marriage to Florence, Dickens goes one step further, positing that only coverture's transformation of woman into the non-entity of the wife can dissolve the proprietary logic that animates the slavery-marriage metaphor, and erase slavery's memory from the Victorian family in which it has lain dormant for decades. Like Burge, Dickens ties coverture to emancipation, but he does so in the interest not of granting slavery an afterlife, but in the hopes of unbraiding its form and erasing its traces.

At the same time, it is clear that such a project is fraught with contradictions, and the extent to which one accepts Dickens's belief in the power of modern marriage to dissolve slavery's possessive forms might ultimately be a question of the extent to which one believes that Dickens's nearly obsessive cataloguing of slavery's cultural legacy in *Dombey and Son* was meant to be forgotten by the novel's conclusion. Dombey lives in a house where diamond necklaces resemble halters, in a city where he can find a statue of "two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra" (469), in a world where one's neighbors tell stories of sinking West India ships loaded with "three hundred and fifty tons" of unnamed cargo (54), in a novel that names among its primary forerunners *Robinson Crusoe*. It seems like an oversimplification to argue that Dickens imagined such a rich and minutely catalogued history could be memorialized on nearly every page and then forgotten, disappeared with an act of grammatical ingenuity. More likely, I think we can read in Florence's gesture an acknowledgement of the ways in which intimate acts, at least in *Dombey and Son*, aspire to forget that slavery has helped constitute the very language of pleasure, of familial kinship, and of the adorable affections that the novel sometimes looks to as an escape from the relative confines of heterosexual normativity. At the moment that Walter's domestic slavery transforms into marital bliss, at the moment that Florence's self-erasure erases slavery's past, their place within the "house of bondage" becomes most secure. In a novel so taken with the ironies involved in comparing marriage to slavery, this last irony was perhaps not meant to be lost upon us either.

Though this irony offers little encouragement with respect to the novel's view of femininity, it may offer a more complex view of how Dickens understands the memory of slavery to work in this novel, and in Victorian culture as a whole. For Walter and Sol, for Dombey and Edith, for Bunsby and Mrs. MacStinger and, most importantly, for Florence and Walter, intimacy offers an occasion both to name a relation to slavery and to rename it as something else: as affection, as

transaction, as philosophy, as self-denial. Familial relations seem uniquely able to make the ghost of slavery appear, and disappear, and reappear again. Memory thus becomes an act not of recall but of forgetting in order to re-remember, to remember anew, the role that slavery plays in shaping the novel's relations. In this way, we might read Sol as a figure not just of an "old fashioned," benevolent proprietorship, but also of a nostalgia for the slave past that Dickens seems to find at once appealing and outmoded, destined to fade away. The question the novel seems to pose, then, is whether this nostalgia is more or less ethical than Dombey's "modern" perspective, removed from slavery's past and therefore unknowingly caught in its repetition. A direct confrontation with the present-day aftermath of the trade—what Walter's trip to Barbados implicitly provides—leads to a desire to erase its memory completely. Yet the novel's conclusion provides opportunities to question what the purpose of both memory and its erasure might be.

As the novel nears its conclusion, we are granted one final glimpse inside the House of Dombey. The firm has declared bankruptcy, Florence and Walter have left for China, and Dombey is left to mull over the "domestic shame" of his "fallen" condition (904), the only glimpse the novel accords of Dombey in his state of ruin. Just before the novel descends into Dombey's remorseful consciousness, however, the narration takes an interesting turn. Dickens reports that information about the current conditions of the house (and particularly the sight of Miss Tox coming and going) comes by way of the Major. His knowledge, however, comes from a more important source: the Native:

> The Major, in a fit of curiosity, has charged the Native to watch the house sometimes, and find out what becomes of Dombey. The Native has reported Miss Tox's fidelity, and the Major has nearly choked himself dead with laughter. He is permanently bluer from that hour, and constantly wheezes to himself, his lobster eyes starting out of his head, 'Damme, Sir, the woman's a born idiot!'
> And the ruined man. How does he pass the hours, alone? (904)

Though the final question posed here might be read as a rhetorical one, posed and answered by the narrator, the passage that precedes it points towards a different reading: that the question has been

posed (whether by the Major or by the narrator) to the Native, who alone has been tasked with reporting on the condition of the Dombey household. In this reading, the scene that follows—Dombey's wretchedness, his contemplation of suicide, and his reunion with Florence—might thus be read as focalized through the Native's perspective as much as through the eyes of Dombey or Florence, the other characters who take part in and watch this scene unfold. In this light, the indictment of Dombey, House and Firm, comes from the only colonial subject invited into the novel's representative frame, who melds, momentarily, with the omniscient perspective of the novel's narrator. The colonial subject, however briefly, becomes the subject responsible for communicating the novel's admittedly limited acts of justice.

But can justice for slavery be done, by the novel's characters or by the realist novel itself? *Dombey and Son* offers to punish the fugitive or to accept her back into domesticity's embrace, to scandalize slavery, to laugh at it, or to erase it, but these alternatives seem to offer inadequate compensation for the debt to slavery that Victorian culture owed, not just for modern readers, but also for Dickens himself. What reparation can the novel make, then? In the novel's parting moments, Dickens reports that the House of Dombey has fallen, but one small piece remains:

> Nothing had drifted from the wreck of his fortunes, but a certain annual sum that comes he knows not how, with an earnest entreaty that he will not seek to discover, and with the assurance that it is a debt, and an act of reparation. He has consulted with his old clerk about this, who is clear it may be honourably accepted, and has no doubt it arises out of some forgotten transaction in the times of the old House. (943)

The repayment comes from the family of Carker, following his role in bringing down the firm. But it might also, in the context of the novel's 1840s composition and setting, remind us of the reparations paid by the Slavery Compensation Committee to former slaveholders in the British West Indies.

Recent work by Nicholas Draper has shown that the 1840s witnessed the conclusion of the slavery compensation campaign, responsible for making restitution to the former owners of freed slaves across the British Caribbean (rather than to the ex-slaves themselves). As Draper documents,

the money from the Committee went directly to numerous individuals, families, and institutions in metropolitan London, where many of the absentee landlords and beneficiaries of the Caribbean plantations lived. These payments redirected slavery's "injury" away from slaves themselves towards the "damage" that emancipation did to the slaveholdern economy. In the same way, the novel concludes by focusing on repairing the lives of its metropolitan characters in the wake of slavery's end. Reading the novel's closing lines as an indirect (and most likely unintentional) reminder of this "act of reparation" raises formal and ethical questions about the novel's own reparative possibilities. The novel provides an opportunity for a judgment against Dombey, and against the arrangements of the Victorian domestic spaces within which nearly all of the novel is contained, when it opens up the possibility that Dombey's fall and redemption are witnessed by and focalized through the Native. But like the Native, in the end the novel remains largely silent about the precise colonial crimes for which Dombey and his firm might be held responsible. This demurral is, of course, characteristic of the realist novel—a form whose devotion to crime and punishment often implicates injured parties who remain beyond its representational frame. What the novel presents in the place of precise historical accounting is a series of novelistic performances that implicate the tropes, norms, practices of domination, and modes of response and relation characteristic of slavery on behalf of its English cast of characters. The memories of slavery conjured by these performances in turn help illuminate the paradoxes and mixed emotions that animate the "old fashioned" and modern structures of feeling underwriting these characters' relationships to one another and the social world they inhabit. More importantly, their identifications with, attempted escapes from, and ultimately transformations of social relations that the novel identifies as "slavery" are in large part what grant these characters depth, and what, in the case of characters like Walter, Florence, Dombey, and Edith, helps Dickens depict their movement from allegorical symbol or stock character towards a fuller subjectivity, as each character performs a distinct "escape" from their metaphorical slavery, assuming increasingly

complex emotions and social roles in the process. If slavery comes to function as a form of injury done to English characters and the scene for their development, the novel's resolution also offers those characters the only forms of "reparation" available within *Dombey and Son*. In this way, the metaphor offered by the Slavery Compensation Committee, and its curious understanding of "reparation," proves apt for describing the possibilities and limitations of Dickens's own record of slavery's legacy. Dickens provocatively details the role that slavery has played in crafting affective roles that give shape to homosocial and heterosexual forms of the family in Victorian England. In the end, however, the only reparation this representational practice can offer is to memorialize the winding path of memory and its erasure, an erasure that creates a world in which the novel's domestic subjects could imagine they owed so little to England's slave past.

Chapter Three
Captivity and Captivation in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

In July 1848, Charlotte Brontë wrote to her publisher, W. S. Williams, to thank him for sending her a copy of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. "[T]his book," Brontë wrote, "seems to give me eyes."[169] Like many Victorian readers, Brontë was captivated by Ruskin's descriptions of Turner's paintings, sighing, "Who can read these glowing descriptions of Turner's works without longing to see them?"[170] In his discussions of Turner's paintings, Ruskin famously attempts to capture in writing the "force" of Turner's depictions of "water surface," where, in Ruskin's description, "there is a might and wonder about it which will not admit of our whys and hows."[171] Singling out Turner's *Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying—Typhoon coming on* for praise, Ruskin reports that "Its daring conception, ideal in the highest sense of the word, is based on the purest truth, and wrought out with the concentrated knowledge of a life…and the whole picture dedicated to the most sublime of subjects and impressions (completing thus the perfect system of all truth, which we have shown to be formed by Turner's works)—the power, majesty, and deathfulness of the open, deep, illimitable

[169] Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, Haworth, 31 July 1848, *Selected Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 112.

[170] Ibid., 113. Brontë would, in fact, go on to see Turner's works a year later. In the winter of 1849-50, she wrote several letters recording her delight at visiting private exhibitions of Turner's watercolors; during those same years, she also visited the National Gallery and Royal Academy, where several Turner paintings were on display, though not *Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying—Typhoon coming on*. For paintings exhibited by Turner in 1849/1850, see George Walter Thornbury, *The Life of J. M. W. Turner*, Volume 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), Google Books e-book. In *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel*, Julia Sun-Joo Lee similarly argues that one of Jane Eyre's watercolors was "clearly inspired by J. M. W. Turner's famous painting, *The Slave Ship*" (43), arguing that Jane reproduces the image to prefigure the deathlike, "drowning" sensation that overwhelms her after her near-marriage to Rochester—a brush with death that inspires her "fugitive" flight from Thornfield (45). If Brontë did indeed draw on the image in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, her purpose in the latter was distinct in that it avoided collapsing Lucy Snowe's particular experience of abjection into that of the slaves portrayed in Turner's painting, as I will argue at the end of this chapter.

[171] John Ruskin, "Of Water as Painted by Turner," *Modern Painters*, edited and abridged by David Barrie (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987), 147. Hereafter cited in text.

sea." (160).[172]

Turner's *Slavers* is now understood to be based upon the infamous *Zong* massacre of 1781, in which slave traders threw four hundred and forty slaves overboard the Liverpool slave ship that was carrying them in order to recoup an insurance payment on their human cargo.[173] The sublimity that Ruskin refers to is not, ostensibly, slavery, which is positioned as a footnote to his description of the work (to explain his description of the ship as "guilty"), but his description nonetheless betrays a kind of symbolics of slavery swept up in his account of Turner's scene. Ruskin isolates the "intense and lurid splendour which burns like gold, and bathes like blood," while the sea, "encumbered with corpses," becomes the site of a "deep-drawn breath after the torture of the storm" (159-60). Amidst the intermingling of "gold" and "blood" that characterizes the slave trade, the ship comes to seem "girded with condemnation" (160), presenting readers with a dramatic *tableau* of slavery's crimes forged from the play of light, color, and movement in Ruskin's description.

In her 1853 novel *Villette*, Brontë concludes with another shipwreck scene. The shipwreck was of course a common trope in Romantic and Gothic British literature, appearing in works ranging from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

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[172] I am indebted to Ella Mershon, whose writing on and discussions of Turner's *Slavers* first introduced me to the controversies surrounding what she calls Turner's "materialist" uses of color, which in turn informs my own claim that *Villette*'s similarity to Turner's painting provides occasion to consider the relationship between color, materialism, slavery, and historical memory that Mershon finds in Turner's painting in Brontë's novel. Mershon argues that by expressing "disgust" with Turner's use of color and paint, audiences were in fact revealing their discomfort with the way his painting's visceral qualities brought slavery too close to British viewers, whose memories of slavery were otherwise distant. In this chapter, I argue that while Lucy Snowe ostensibly expresses a similar discomfort with the "materialist" qualities of both aesthetic objects and the racialized body, she also finds herself dominated by those aesthetic objects, in a parallel to the putatively pleasurable dominations of willing slavery. Moreover, while I argue that Brontë shares what Mershon describes as Turner's interest in combating viewers' forgetting by bringing slavery closer to the painting's viewers, I argue that Brontë does so by syntactically disrupting the linear relationship between past, present, and future, to open up slavery's past into a suspended and unending present moment.

[173] Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005), 268.

and Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* to Brontë's own *Jane Eyre*, which opens with a scene in which young Jane contemplates a shipwreck scene in Bewick's *History of Birds*.[174] But the shipwreck that concludes *Villette* remains notable for two reasons: first, for its similarly vivid rendering and for its famously inconclusive resolution. As the novel draws to a close, *Villette*'s narrator, Lucy Snowe, returns to the image of tempest at sea that has appeared throughout the novel as a leitmotif for describing Lucy's various scenes of abandonment, including the death of her parents and her long, lonely period of isolation at the pensionnat early in the novel. In the novel's closing pages, however, the storm appears to be literal, as Lucy describes in detail her vision of the murderous sea and sky:

> The skies hang full and dark—a rack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms—arches and broad radiations; there rise resplendent mornings—glorious, royal, purple as monarch in his state; the heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest—so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride….That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder—the tremor of whose plumes was storm.[175]

Like the scene that Ruskin describes, Lucy's storm appears a mixture of blood and flame whose "perfect work" is inseparable from its taking in of bodies and lives until the sea becomes a kind of swollen grave.

The wreck that Brontë details destroys a ship carrying M. Paul home to Lucy after three years in Guadeloupe, where he was sent to manage a plantation presumably worked by slaves belonging to Madame Walravens.[176] Whether M. Paul managed to escape the wreck is left

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[174] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 10-11. Hereafter cited in text.

[175] Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 545-6. Hereafter cited in text.

[176] In her excellent introduction to *Villette*, Cooper dates the novel in roughly the 1820s (xix); consequently, Cooper asserts, M. Paul's voyage to Guadeloupe would have coincided with slavery, which existed in the French department from 1802 until French abolition in 1848 (xlv). I am indebted to Cooper's introduction for her discussion of the novel's Guadeloupe setting and its function as a particularly strong index of slavery's significance to the novel—a point that Cooper herself suggests has rarely been made elsewhere. See: Helen Cooper, "Introduction," *Villette* (New

ambiguous, as Lucy instructs herself to "Let [readers] picture union and a happy succeeding life" (546). In an 1853 letter to her publisher George Smith, however, Brontë offers a somewhat different portrait of the alternatives such an ending presents to the novel's readers:

> With regard to that momentous point—M. Paul's fate—in case any one in future should request to be enlightened thereon—they may be told that it was designed that every reader should settle the catastrophe for himself, according to the quality of his disposition, the tender or remorseless impulse of his nature. Drowning and matrimony are the fearful alternatives. The Merciful…will of course choose the former and milder doom—drown him to put him out of pain. The cruel-hearted will on the contrary pitilessly impale him on the second horn of the dilemma—marrying him without ruth or compunction to that—person—that—that—individual—"Lucy Snowe."[177]

The "union" that, in *Villette*, Brontë describes as a happiness, is now recast as a "pain" enjoyed only by the most "remorseless" of readers; drowning, by contrast, a "tender" resolution. The shipwreck, in other words, is no longer a scene of fire and blood—on the contrary, that violence is saved for the marriage plot between M. Paul and Lucy, which could only be enjoyed by the "cruel-hearted." Yet despite Brontë's sly recasting of the "horror" that drives the novel's concluding scene (a horror now meant to symbolize the marriage plot rather than a violent death at sea), the scene that Brontë here describes mirrors the slavery scene that Ruskin describes. For Brontë's description of the marriage plot is not merely one of *horror*, but of *justice*; M. Paul's marriage to Lucy is not just painful or cruel, but seemingly unjust, desired only by those readers who lack "ruth," "compunction," pity, or remorse—who lack a conscience feeling of guilt at witnessing M. Paul's binding union with Lucy Snowe. Brontë reveals, in other words, that the scene that we have been asked to witness is not merely the matter of romance, of novelistic resolution, or of character satisfaction that we expect from a marriage plot, but instead of ethical judgment—a question not of love, but of guilt. A guilt so

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York: Penguin Books, 2004), xi-xlviii.

[177] Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Haworth, 26 March 1853, *Selected Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 217-8. I was first made aware of this quotation in the notes to Penguin edition edited by Helen M. Cooper, where it appears in full.

momentous that what Ruskin describes as the "deep-drawn breath" of the swelling sea seems by comparison a form of relief and an act of mercy.

Guilt and justice, autonomy and subjection, aesthetics and ethics, bodily subjection and imagined relief, marriage and slavery together comprise, in this retelling, the novel's elusive conclusion. In this chapter, I propose to explain Brontë's description of the novel's conclusion by tracing the relationship between these terms within the novel. In particular, I explore how Brontë places the outmoded intimacies between marriage and slavery that we first saw in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* alongside and within an aestheticized world, one in which the vivid visuality and narrative silences that define Brontë's ending become bound up with a modernity marked by the emergence of female autonomy on the one hand, and the afterlife of colonial slavery on the other. In this way, Brontë both echoes and complicates Dickens's assessment of Edith's feminine free will, its paradoxical self-enslavement, and its relationship to a seemingly more sanguine form of familial, "domestic slavery" embodied by the seafaring Walter Gay. Whereas in *Dombey and Son*, the scene of the ship bound for the slavery colonies evokes a sense of melancholic nostalgia for a world in which family and slavery were bound to one another by shared modes of obligation, affection, and acquisition, in *Villette*, the shipwreck emerges as a way of marking off the unnarratable fact of modern colonial slavery from a form of white slavery that helps define the realist novel's marriage plot. In the first half of this chapter, I turn to Paulina Home as a figure who represents a familiar form of affectionate slavery. For Paulina, affection and marital consent are defined by a pleasurable subjection not only to Graham Bretton, her childhood playmate and, eventually, her husband, but also to the logic of consanguine kinship that Brontë depicts as a primitive form of social relation directly dependent upon the willing captivity of daughters and wives. Brontë does not so much critique this plot, however, as underscore Lucy's foreclosure from it, as one of the most radically orphaned characters in Victorian fiction, as a subject whose fascination with the female form cannot

be accommodated by this novel's marriage plot, and, above all, as that "individual" whose impending union is suspended indefinitely in the novel's closing pages. In the second half of this chapter, I argue that in place of the female captivity or slavery that Lucy tries and fails to approximate in the novel's closing chapters, Lucy instead finds herself in thrall, throughout the novel, to a form of aesthetic captivation that is likewise tied to slavery, but in very different ways. Tracing Lucy's responses to various works of art, I argue that these responses mirror Paulina's "willing" subjection, gesturing towards a mode of aesthetic appreciation that shares some of the imagined pleasures of domestic slavery. At the same time, however, Brontë finds in aesthetic captivation the grounds to both reevaluate and critique colonial slavery in ways that Paulina's plot of "happy" submission would at first seem to obscure.

In order to explore the connections between domestic slavery and aesthetic experience that Brontë's novel makes available, this chapter will expand outward from the themes explored in the first half of this project. Whereas in the first two chapters I examined the ways in which slavery provides both a history of and a figure for the development of domesticity, romance, and the marriage plot in early Victorian fiction, in the second two chapters I will examine how that relation was complicated, tested, and expanded upon through a renewed interest in slavery's relationship to various forms of aesthetics and performance and to the project of self-cultivation with which they have come to be associated. In doing so, these chapters build on work by Simon Gikandi, Jennifer Brody, Rachel Teukolsky, Daphne Brooks, and others who have demonstrated the role that both discourses of race and slavery, and depictions of slaves themselves played in the development of notions of taste, perception, and visual and performance cultures in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, Simon Gikandi argues that of the "omissions, repressions, and conceptual failures" that helped to define "the discourse of taste" in eighteenth-century Britain, none was more central than slavery, as slaves came to be understood as "the

counterpoint to modernity itself," and therefore as the figures against whose experience modern aesthetics came to be defined.[178] While Gikandi offers a range of instances where the history of taste abuts the history of slavery, perhaps the most evident can be found in the "debates on the physical and physiological nature of [visual] perception" from which eighteenth-century discourses of aesthetics on the one hand and racial difference on the other so clearly emerge.[179] Building on Gikandi's assertions, the second half of this chapter will explore how slavery intersects with a discourse of aestheticism and with Brontë's own highly stylized narrative in *Villette*, in order to gesture towards the ways in which slavery's legacy returned to shape a specifically Victorian view of aesthetics—one that, as Benjamin Morgan has argued, was predicated not upon the expression of free will but upon its subjection to and submersion within the world of the body. More specifically, drawing on the interplay of artistic experimentation, color, commodity consumption, and the aesthetics of racial difference (and most notably skin color) that Rachel Teukolsky and Alys Eve Weinbaum have argued was central to the development of a "modern" aesthetic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I argue that Brontë similarly attempts to "aestheticize" racial history, a history that she imagines as related to both the long history of "ancient" or "primitive" domestic slavery I outlined in the previous chapter and to the more immediate history of modern Atlantic slavery that comes to the fore in the novel's closing chapters. What makes *Villette* distinctive is precisely the novel's attempts to make visible the ways in which the domestic slavery plot is shaped

[178] Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton UP, 2011), 25, 39. Similarly, Rowena Fowler has argued that the trope of being made a "slave" to various forms of decadent pleasure—fashion, luxury, drink, but also poetic rhyme—was common in the nineteenth century, particularly in Victorian poetry (60-1). See: Rowena Fowler, "Browning and Slavery," *Victorian Poetry* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 59-70.

[179] Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, 42. For more on the history of visual perception, color, and the apprehension of race, see also Irene Tucker, *The Moment of Racial Sight: A History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012) and David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000). In *Creole Crossings*, Carolyn Berman also offers an interesting reading of the history of epidermal "blackness" and its affiliation with figurative forms of "blackness" in nineteenth-century medical discourse, and the role that this epidermal coloration plays in *Jane Eyre* (131-6).

by a racial aesthetic—and to counterpose that plot and what I will describe as its racial and aesthetic forms of "whiteness" with forms of aesthetic experience that test the limits of the racial "color system" that Gikandi and others argue was inseparable from the formation of British taste. By offering a taxonomy of the multiple forms that "enslavement" takes on in Brontë's novel, we can begin to observe the fuller emergence of a paradox that I first discussed in the previous chapter: that slavery serves as a language for describing the distinctive challenges that romance plots pose to self-consciousness and self-cultivation within Victorian England. But whereas in *Dombey and Son*, this paradox was intended to deflate the possibility of a sustained, self-conscious female character who could remain fully embedded within Victorian culture, I argue that in *Villette*, Brontë imagines this paradox as a sustaining one, that helps recast the female subject as one capable of engaging with aesthetic and performative practices that reframe slavery's afterlife as part of the Victorian present rather than seeking to erase it.

Willing Slavery and the Spaniel Affections of Paulina Home and M. Paul Emmanuel

Like *Dombey and Son*, *Villette* offers what I would describe as a "willing slavery" plot: a plot that features white, English characters whose trajectories are defined not by their development from dependency to independence or from naiveté to self-consciousness, but rather by their movements from one form of dependency to another. It is one of the hallmarks of Charlotte Brontë's fiction that the desire for independence is strained by a competing desire for attachment, shelter, and, above all, dependence upon others. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, Jane protests to Rochester that she "will not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio…so don't consider me an equivalent for one. If you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay, and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here" (310), foreshadowing Rochester's later attempts to ensnare Jane in a bigamist plot alongside his Creole wife, Bertha Mason. For Brontë, Jane and Rochester's first marriage plot is

troubling not merely because of the legal and social taboos it threatens, but also because it risks turning Jane into a dependent, cast outside of Victorian law and social order the better to bind her to Rochester, much like Bertha Mason, who finds herself doubly subsumed by the laws of coverture and her separation from her birth family in Jamaica. Though most recent accounts of the novel concur that Bertha should be understood as a white Creole, her absorption into Thornfield as an "alien" denied social and legal protection mimics the classic definition of slavery as a form of social death predicated upon the disruption of natal bonds and the relocation of the slave as a liminal civil subject whose only recognition and protection comes from the family that enslaves him.[180] These resemblances end, of course, at the point where her brother, Richard Mason, and his acquaintances appear, periodically, to assert a measure of protection, however faint, by confronting Rochester and arresting his original attempt to marry Jane, marking Bertha's fundamental difference from the natally alienated slaves from whose labor her family presumably profited. Nonetheless, they serve to symbolize a social order in which colonial slavery and Western marriage lie on a continuum of shared legal and social design. Female characters' relationships to these institutions vary according to their race and place of birth, to be sure. But both the Gothic horror and the irony of *Jane Eyre*'s first marriage plot lies in the notion that the upwardly mobile marriage plot could so easily become a technique for securing the social death, and therefore absolute dependency, of a white, English woman, even one who defines herself so assiduously in opposition to the colonial slave and, eventually, to the transplanted, white Creole.

Ostensibly, *Jane Eyre* relegates such resemblances to the "bad" marriage plot, marked out

[180] For a discussion of Bertha's Creole identity, and the racial ambiguities that attend her status as a "Creole," see Berman, *Creole Crossings*, 122-5. Spivak argues that the language of the non-human that Brontë applies to Bertha sanctions her redefinition as the colonial "Other" who is, by definition, denied legal recognition. But it seems that such language might also reflect the more basic fact that as a married woman subject to the laws of coverture and at the same time physically removed from her birth family and from her original place of citizenship, that she would by definition become a subject outside of the law, and therefore mirror, if not entirely mimic, the situation of the New World slave.

from those courtships that successfully draw a Victorian realist novel to a close by entangling marriage in the snares of bigamy, adultery, or psychological abuse.[181] When Jane and Rochester's courtship is repeated a second time in the form of a "good" marriage plot, Bertha Mason and the faint suggestion of domestic slavery she carries with her have been displaced from the novel, leaving behind a union in which female independence and domesticity have been reconciled because, as Jenny Sharpe puts it, Jane's "future husband, in effect, names the new assertive female" as a "domestic individual" whose autonomy remains comfortably contained within, rather than strained against, the confines of her marriage to Rochester.[182] In this sense, Jane embodies a position of independence-within-dependency that the novel projects outward as a model for the colonial subjects St. John Rivers leaves England to Christianize at the novel's conclusion, and thus to transform (through what Gayatri Spivak describes as a process of "soul-making") into autonomous subjects who will nonetheless presumably remain loyal to and subsumed within the British empire. Implicit within Spivak's reading of the novel—and in the novel's bifurcated conclusion—is thus less a separation between or an erasure of the relationship between marriage and slavery than an inversion of their relation to one another. Whereas slavery initially (historically, as well as chronologically in the novel's plot) provides the blueprint for the civil and social disabilities enacted by coverture and that are at risk in the bad marriage plot that Jane at first finds herself within, in the novel's closing pages, marriage provides a model for a "better" kind of dependency that develops out of but takes the place of colonial slavery. In the novel's conclusion, Jane once again mirrors Bertha as the heiress to a colonial fortune sequestered from metropolitan English society when she is secreted away with Rochester inside Ferndean. But this time, the resemblance represents not an

[181] Kelly Hager has termed plots in which marriages disintegrate "failed marriage plots," a term which this definition expands upon slightly. I draw upon both of these terms throughout this chapter.

[182] Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 54.

ironic repetition of Bertha's fate but its sublation, as marriage again contains slavery's legacy, but now in a newly altered form.[183] The newly-inverted relationship between slavery and marriage only comes to seem more literal if we take into account, as Sue Thomas argues, that Brontë alludes throughout *Jane Eyre* to Parliamentary debates regarding the practice of "domestic slavery" in India in the nineteenth century.[184] If Jane offers Christian, heterosexual marriage as a model for what domestic slavery might become at home in England, St. John Rivers may be engaged, Thomas's account suggests, in teaching the same lesson abroad at the novel's close.

Not unlike Dickens, then, Brontë suggests, in *Jane Eyre*, that the bond between marriage and slavery cannot—and, indeed, ought not—be severed or erased so much as reordered, so that the middle-class Victorian marriage can be rewritten as a solution to or more felicitous version of domestic slavery, rather than finding itself monstrously mirrored in the chattel slavery system. In order to arrive at this conclusion, however, Brontë must differentiate the good marriage plot from the bad, just as Dickens must distinguish the extremes of Edith's viewpoint—which aligns marriage and chattel slavery to throw into relief the feminist independence towards which she strains—from Florence and Walter's burgeoning understanding that marriage alone can satisfy the desires that domestic slavery's abolition has left behind. In *Villette*, Brontë returns to slavery to investigate the appeal of the good marriage plot, echoing the world of slavish familiarity we find in *Dombey and Son* in her depictions of Paulina Home and M. Paul Emmanuel. But unlike *Dombey and Son*, and unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* takes more seriously the confrontation between the good marriage and the bad, willing slavery and female autonomy that Dickens, in his portrayal of Walter and Florence, tries to

[183] In her reading of the novel, Berman argues that the "reform" of the marriage plot and its relationship to the "reform" of colonial slavery is emblematized by the figure of the governess, a figure of both colonial and domestic reform. The novel's pairing of English governess and unruly Creole, Berman argues, represents the "difficulties of 'governing' slavery in a 'governessing' way, by taking on the burdens of social reproduction at home and abroad all at once" (143).

[184] Sue Thomas, *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9-10.

circumvent, by tying her novel's aesthetic to the perspective of the female "individual" as much as Dickens ties the unique aesthetic of *Dombey and Son* to the melancholic tones with which he paints domestic slavery. In order to observe these contrasts, however, we must first turn to Brontë's depiction of willing slavery in *Villette*.

In *Villette*, the dependencies that I argue define the willing slavery plot are embodied by Paulina Home, who is introduced to the novel as a young girl left temporarily at the Bretton's home while her father recuperates from the death of her mother. In the novel's early chapters, Polly comes to represent the conjunction of the two forms of emotional experience that slavery could signify: namely, the pleasures of affection and the alienation of that pleasure. In the novel's early chapters, Polly is defined by a distinctive—and distinctly exaggerated—form of slavish devotion, first to her father, and then to Graham Bretton. As Maureen Moran has argued, "As a child, Polly is both tyrant and slave. She lies down at John's feet like a dog. She tries to monopolize his attention. Her pleasure is totally relational, defined by his desire."[185] Polly's existence, in other words, depends upon her ability to attach her affections to another person. Observing that Polly has refused to eat or sleep following her father's departure, Mrs. Bretton explains that "If she were to take a fancy to anybody in the house, she would soon settle; but not till then" (14). As a result, Lucy comes to see Polly as a kind of automaton, one whose movements and expressions are tied up entirely in others: "One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence" (29). For Lucy, Polly exists in a state of pure dependency, in which not just her feelings but her capacity for feeling in itself depends upon Graham for its animation.

[185] Maureen Moran, "Nuns and Priests: Sensations of the Cloister: Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and the Monologues of Robert Browning" (*Catholic Sensationalism and Victorian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007), 92.

Polly Home thus functions, in these early chapters, as a figure for a particular mode of affective feeling and social relation against which Lucy guards herself from the first moments of the novel. Embodying an emotionality that is at once overabundant and at the same time strangely empty (insofar as Polly draws her emotional reserves not from an autonomous consciousness but rather from the person to whom she attaches herself), Polly represents to Lucy a particular form of affinity that both animates and evacuates the agency of its subject. The result is a form of emotional dependency that mirrors (and renders hyperbolic) the dependencies that characters such as Jane Eyre fear and that characters such as Walter Gay, young Paul Dombey, and Uncle Sol warmly embrace.

From Lucy's perspective, this heightened emotionality comes to seem like a type of labor, albeit a labor that is continually recast in the guise of play. In the novel's early scenes, for instance, Polly plays the part of the domestic servant: "Graham was shortly after heard lauding her to the skies; promising that, when he had a house of his own, she should be his housekeeper, and perhaps—if she showed any culinary genius—his cook" (27). Later, we find Polly at play with a doll, the toy whose passivity and responsiveness mirrors Paulina's own. Brontë reports that the doll, named Candace, is so "christened by Graham; for, indeed, its begrimed complexion gave it much of an Ethiopian aspect" (34). Alluding, alternately, to the household servant and to the African woman, Lucy considers Paulina's peculiar form of emotional dependency a mirror, more specifically, for the alienated labor (emotional as well as physical) of the servant or the domestic slave. Put another way: where Dickens sees the quaint pleasures of love and familial obligation (embodied most exaggeratedly by little Paul Dombey, who shares Paulina's uncanny precocity), Lucy discerns at the heart of this pleasure the faint traces of an emotional labor that, in its risk of alienation, can also come to seem mechanical, lifeless, and strange.

At the same time, Lucy suggests that Polly's expressions of affection could be understood as

a studied performance that is not just pleasurable or playful, but also an open expression of Paulina's surprisingly stubborn will. While during the day, Polly can spend hours with Mrs. Bretton "never kindling once to originality, or showing a single gleam of the peculiarities of her nature" (27), she springs into a more theatrical mode when Graham returns. After recounting how Polly's capacity for feeling is stirred to life by Graham's presence, Lucy explains that Polly "learned the names of all his school-fellows in a trice; she got by heart their characters as given from his lips…Some she learned to mimic" (29) for Graham's benefit. Polly's responsiveness is defined not just by her sensitivity to Graham's feelings, in other words, but also by her ability to turn that sensitivity into a mode of mimicry that allows her to both mime Graham's feelings and to stir them through her own theatrical performances. More importantly, Polly astutely performs the part of the self-sacrificing woman, as Lucy reports that she "found Graham and her breakfasting *tête-a-tête*—she standing at his elbow, and sharing his fare: excepting the marmalade, which she delicately refused to touch; lest, I suppose, it should appear that she had procured it as much on her own account as his. She constantly evinced these nice perceptions and delicate instincts" (27). Polly's conspicuous self-denial underscores her selfless devotion to Graham, but it also underscores how her performance of this role draws attention to itself, the better to dramatize a version of female selfhood defined by its self-negation. Polly does not just dramatize her dependency on Graham, but also turns the alienation of affection and the divorce of exterior expression from interior will into a performance of self-willed femininity. Not unlike Dickens's depiction of Edith, Lucy's narration of Polly makes clear that her performance of "slavery" serves to underscore rather than erase her will. Early in the novel, Brontë thus invites a similarly paradoxical understanding of the relationship between slavishness and femininity in which the performance of dependency becomes an ironic assertion of female agency. Paulina's peculiar affections can come to seem like a form of alienated emotional labor, but they can also come to seem like a carefully elaborated performance of self-willed subjection.

While Paulina's early performances recall scenes of enslavement—literal and figurative—that have been explored earlier in this project, it is not until Brontë turns to Paulina's marriage plot later in the novel that she explicitly connects her curiously affectionate disposition to the discourses of domestic slavery I explored in the previous chapter. As the courtship between Paulina and Graham unfolds, Lucy's narration frames that courtship in a language of clan warfare, blood ties, and property exchange that reimagines the Homes and Brettons not as characters in a modern Victorian novel, but rather as figures from the ancient families featured in the anthropological texts I touched upon in the previous chapter, which imagine the adoption of wives and the captivity of slaves as closely related phenomena. By turning to this imagined history, Brontë turns Paulina into an embodiment of the wife as "willing" slave—albeit one whose distinctive confluence of dependency and self-consciousness changes slavery's meaning in significant ways. When Paulina returns later in the novel, she once again meets Graham, who has forgotten her but soon begins to court her. Initially, Graham attempts to draw Lucy into playing the part of the "officious soubrette" in a "love drama" (352), suggesting that readers can anticipate a modern marriage plot in which the bonds of friendship will spur the hero and heroine towards a union dictated by companionate love. Lucy, of course, refuses the part that Graham offers; in the same way, Lucy's narration ultimately refuses the terms of conjugal companionship in which Graham attempts to set his desire for Paulina. In its place, Lucy's narration recasts the marriage plot that Graham and Paulina share in the very terms of conquest, captivity, and consanguine alliance that modern readers might expect the novel's "love drama" to supplant.[186]

[186] In her discussion of slavery and the novel's marriage plot in "The Strange Career of Love and Slavery: Chesnutt, Engels, Masoch," Nancy Bentley describes slavery as the "affective unconscious" of the marriage plot. Describing the work of Chesnutt, Engels, and Masoch, Bentley writes, "Writing in the wake of the ascendance of contract, Chesnutt, Engels, and Masoch all insist that the key to explicating the marriage contract lies in slavery. Slavery for these authors is also, and not coincidentally, a progenitor of the novel. Marriage and the novel, two incarnations of contract, are the unacknowledged descendants of slavery and, thereby, forms that carry within them a memory

Graham, who Lucy notes, "was born victor, as some are born vanquished" (479), is painted by Mr. Home as both traitor and pillager: "you have given me the usual reward of hospitality. I entertained you; you have taken my best….I will not say you *robbed* me, but I am bereaved, and what I have lost, *you*, it seems, have won" (479). More importantly, Mr. Home recasts this scene of invasion and defeat as an expression of tribal history rather than modern courtship: "You triumph, no doubt: John Graham, you descended partly from a Highlander and a chief, and there is a trace of the Celt in all you look, speak, and think. … The red—(Well, then, Polly, the *fair*) hair, the tongue of guile, and brain of wile, are all come down by inheritance" (479-80). Imagining Graham and Mr. Home as the patriarchs of ancient clans, Brontë openly establishes Paulina's courtship as a scene not just of conquest but of the explicit negotiation of an alliance grounded in consanguine kinship. That Brontë imagines marriage here as the forging of an alliance across blood ties rather than the recognition of conjugal affinity is underscored by Mr. Home's allusions to Graham's genealogy, but also by the peculiar performance of the marriage vow as Brontë depicts it. While Mr. Home encourages Paulina to "Answer this 'braw wooer'" in order to "send him away" (480), Paulina responds not by affirming her desire for or consent to their marriage, but rather by explaining why Graham will prove an auspicious match for her father: "he has known you so long, papa, and suits you so well" (480), before urging them to shake hands. What follows is a staging of the marriage vow—not between Graham and Paulina, but between Graham and her father. Acting as officiant (with Lucy as a silent witness), Paulina instructs: "Indeed, indeed, you *are* friends. Graham, stretch out your right hand. Papa, put out yours. Now, let them touch. Papa, don't be stiff; closer your

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of the banished ontology of the slavish condition. In betraying the affiliation of love and slavery, novels can allow a view of what contract doctrine cannot conceive or explore: the affective unconscious that structures every act of contractual consent" (461). In the same way, Brontë lays bear in this scene the ways in which slavery shapes Paulina's "willing" participation in and performance of the marriage vows, but she does so to distinguish that participation as one that places Paulina outside of the realm of contractual marriage to which the plot of conjugal courtship belongs.

fingers; be pliant—there!" (481). The marriage is sealed not, however, with a kiss, but with an injury and a transference of blood:

> 'But that is not a clasp—it is a grasp! Papa, you gripe like a vice. You crush Graham's hand to the bone; you hurt him!'
>
> He must have hurt him; for he wore a massive ring, set round with brilliants, of which the sharp facets cut into Graham's flesh and drew blood: but pain only made Dr. John laugh, as anxiety made him smile. (481).

In contrast to the diamonds that decorate the traditional wedding ring, which marks the "civilized" consolidation of property through the execution of the marriage contract, the "massive" diamond that adorns Mr. Home's hand draws blood and, with it, draws forth memories of a more barbaric mode of accumulation, exchange, and the forging of exogamous "friendship" that belongs to the ancient family or clan to which Mr. Home alludes. While Mr. Home nominates Paulina as his "little jewel" (472), "the only pearl I have" (472), Brontë depicts the property transfer that he subsequently carries out not as a sign of modern capitalist exchange, but rather as a relic of a time when marriage was a recompense for spilled blood and a reward for conquest.

By relocating her account of Paulina and Graham's marriage to this primitive past, Brontë echoes anthropological accounts that imagine the primitive family as a structure organized around the accumulation and transfer of property, wives, and slaves. Following the "ceremony" that Paulina performs, Brontë does depict her engaged in the "work" of effecting a transmutation of love into the triply-defined "bond" of familial alliance, financial interest, and physical confinement, as Lucy recounts how Paulina,

> with a pair of scissors, glittering in her lap…had severed spoils from each manly head beside her, and was now occupied in plaiting together the gray lock and the golden wave. The plait woven—no silk-thread being at hand to bind it—a tress of her own hair was made to serve that purpose; she tied it like a knot, prisoned it in a locket, and laid it on her heart. … An amulet was indeed made, a spell framed which rendered enmity impossible. She was become a bond to both, an influence over each, a mutual concord. From them she drew her happiness, and what she borrowed, she, with interest, gave back. (482)

Brontë, in other words, explicitly frames Paulina's marriage as a moment of heterosexual exchange—an exchange rendered in the outmoded symbolism of corporeal material (the hair of Graham and Mr. Home) woven together and rendered unbreakable by the bodily bond that Paulina creates between them—a "bond" that Brontë renders, alternately, a prison bar, a form of financial stock, and a superstitious icon (the magical "amulet") that transmutes these physical objects into the ephemeral but even more powerful "spell" of familial love.[187]

Curiously, however, the language of slavery—which elsewhere pervades the novel—is held at a distance here. While Brontë explicitly refers to Graham, M. Paul, Mme. Beck, Lucy, and others as slaves throughout *Villette*, she in fact assiduously *avoids* directly referring to Paulina as a slave, despite the fact that Paulina appears, both in this scene and in the novel's earliest chapters, as the clearest heir to the features of the domestic slave that I described in the previous chapter. Yet I want to argue that this omission is a revealing one, particularly when we read *Villette* alongside Brontë's earlier works. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë, as I have suggested above, invites, both rhetorically and through the construction of the novel's plot, comparisons between the natal alienation and civil death of colonial slaves and the social and legal disabilities risked by women in modern marriages—institutions that Brontë blurs in her depiction of Bertha Mason, who flickers indeterminately for readers, and for Jane herself, between colonial subject and disenfranchised wife.[188] These

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[187] My reading of this scene is particularly shaped by Kathy Psomiades's reading of *The Eustace Diamonds*, which similarly brings together images of diamonds, blood, and female embodiment as the collective symbols of "heterosexual exchange" in Trollope's novel. See: Psomiades, "Heterosexual Exchange and Other Victorian Fictions: 'The Eustace Diamonds' and Victorian Anthropology," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 33, no. 1 (1999): 93-118. For readings of heterosexual exchange and the Victorian marriage plot, see also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), and Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property*.

[188] Gilbert and Gubar famously argue that Bertha Mason represents not the colonized "other" but rather as Jane's double, personifying her resistance towards, and madness in the face of, her impending future as the second Mrs. Rochester. See: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress," *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 336-371. By reading

comparisons, however, ultimately work, as so many critics have observed, to distinguish the "individualist" female subject of the novel from her colonial counterparts. Likewise, in *Shirley*, Brontë frequently imagines Shirley's marriage to Louis Moore as a form of slavery. Yet these comparisons, too, serve to distinguish between Shirley's "modern" perception that marriage demands psychological conflict (a conflict that she experiences as kind of slavery) and her very different interpretation of marriage as a practice of domestic slavery elsewhere in the novel. While Shirley imagines that "Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at east weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her picanniny's head in an unmolested corner of her wigwam" (436), her own marriage takes on a more abject character: "Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of deserts. Her captor alone could cheer her; his society only could make amends for the lost privilege of liberty: in his absence, she sat or wandered alone; spoke little, and ate less" (599). To be sure, Shirley's position echoes the domestic slave she describes earlier in the novel. But by highlighting Shirley's dejection at the loss of her "liberty," in contrast to the "happy" slave wife, to whom such liberty is unknown, Brontë makes visible an (unhappy) female consciousness that survives marital union. While Brontë insists in both novels upon a fundamental affiliation between marriage and slavery, in *Shirley*, she does so in order to delineate a form of psychological depth reserved for the English heroine who alone can confront and, eventually, transform this affiliation into a form of autonomy that can survive the dependency that marriage requires.

By contrast, Paulina remains apparently unaffected by the dependency that marriage requires of her. In Lucy's view, Paulina's marriage is characterized by a "perfect happiness," and a belief, on

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marriage and slavery as distinct but continuous phenomena, it is possible to see Bertha as a representative of neither the colonial other nor the English wife exclusively, but rather of the unstable differentiation of these categories. In her reading of the novel, Berman makes a similar point, arguing, with reference to Bertha Mason, that "The generic Creole ought to mark the difference between English and other, home and wilderness, salaried and enslaved—but, much like the governess turned wife, she cannot" (139).

Lucy's part, that Paulina and Graham belong to that small class of lives for whom "no excessive suffering penetrates their lot, and no tempestuous blackness overcasts their journey" (482). Unlike the heroines who precede her, in other words, Paulina finds her marital bondage to be not just "happy," but freed of the conflict between individualism and romantic fulfillment that defines the Brontëan heroine. As Lucy's sly recognition of Polly's paradoxical display of will, and as Paulina's presiding role over her own marital alliance imply, Paulina enters into this union not just happily, but willingly. As Lucy explains, "In Paulina there was more force, both of feeling and character, than most people thought—than Graham himself imagined—than she would ever show to those who did not wish to see it" (347). What distinguishes the strength of Paulina's agency from that of a conventional Brontëan heroine, however, is that it finds no expression in "free" or pained individuality. In this sense, Paulina embodies the paradox of the wife as "willing" slave that Mill describes in *The Subjection of Women*, for whom slavery is a pleasure. Under these conditions, the originary unity between marriage and slavery is restored to such an extent that these two conditions seem indistinguishable from one another. As a result, Brontë sees no need to invoke "slavery" as a language for describing the dynamics that define Paulina's marriage; as a willing participant in and orchestrator of her own conquest and the bonds of alliance it secures, Paulina returns to the moment when slavery and marriage were entwined, and in embracing its bondages willingly and for her own pleasure, erases slavery's distinction as marriage's ghastly double.

In other words, if Brontë neglects to describe Paulina as a "slave," it is not because she fails to recognize the close alliance between Paulina's distinctive form of excessive affection and the binding emotional attachments ascribed to domestic slaves. On the contrary, Brontë implies that for a character like Paulina, who knowingly and enthusiastically consents to her own bondage, pleasure and slavery simply cease to be distinct enough to warrant metaphorical comparison. Paulina's narrative thus underscores the extent to which the language of enslavement names not merely the

subjection or alienation of women, but also, more specifically, those moments in which they consciously struggle against that subjection, and thereby are granted a fuller (if more painful) interiority as fictional female characters. Because Paulina willingly assents to—rather than strains against—her place within the web of alliance and dependency that characterizes her particular form of domesticity in the novel, she, of all of the novel's characters, most closely approximates the position of the domestic slave while, at the same time, providing the instance in which the language of slavery comes to seem unnecessary for describing her emotional experience in the novel. Paulina comes to represent—for Lucy as much as for Brontë—the fundamental "primitiveness" of the normative, heterosexual marriage and of the realist novel's marriage plot in its most straightforward execution. In the case of Paulina, Brontë imagines that past as a pleasurable one, but by imagining those pleasures as anachronistic, Brontë places them beyond the reach both of the modern novel she is elsewhere engaged in writing. Marriage's primitive bondages may be happy ones, but they are not available to all of the novel's characters equally.

Thus, for Lucy Snowe, affection represents the opposite: a negative form of bondage that she must openly resist later in the novel. Indeed, during one of their early courtship scenes, Brontë replays a version of Paulina's engagement to Graham, albeit to sharply different effect. One evening, Lucy visits M. Paul, where she is greeted by his spaniel, Sylvie, who "sprang to my lap, and with her paws at my neck, and her little nose and tongue somewhat overpoweringly busy about my face, mouth, and eyes, flourished her bushy tail over the desk, and scattered books and papers far and wide" (460). In addition to her overzealous affection, Lucy reports that Sylvie "was very tiny, and had the prettiest little innocent face, the silkiest long ears, the finest dark eyes in the world. I never saw her, but I thought of Paulina de Bassompierre" (460). Sylvie, in other words, introduces into the scene the memory of Polly's spaniel-like affections for Graham—and their eventual fulfillment in her marriage plot. That memory is fitting, given that this scene witnesses one of M. Paul's first

attempts to court Lucy, as he broaches a discussion of Catholicism in the hopes of convincing Lucy to convert. As M. Paul attempts to engage Lucy in conversation, hoping, Lucy reports, "to see something emotional in me" (461), however, Lucy instead picks up a pen knife to mend some of his quills and, "On this occasion I cut my own finger—half on purpose" (461). Drawing her own blood, Lucy momentarily distracts M. Paul, breaking the mood in the room and preparing the way to tell him that she was "not affected at all" by Catholicism's (and, perhaps, by extension, M. Paul's) "touching" appeal. In other words, where Mr. Home draws Graham's blood in order to stage an alliance between their familial clans and secure their homosocial bonds, Lucy draws her own blood to re-assert her freedom from the bonds of love M. Paul offers—both on his own behalf and on those of the Church—and to distinguish herself from the enthusiastic affections of Sylvie, who acts as the witness to this scene.

Read alongside the proposal scene shared by the Homes and Graham that takes place in the following chapter of the novel, Lucy's self-injury underscores not only her resistance to the "spaniel affections" Paulina embodies, but also just how radically removed she is from the consanguine family. Unlike Paulina and Ginevra, the characters who share Lucy's position as young, English women seeking companions in marriage, Lucy remains entirely outside of the kinship network of the novel, rendering the forms of alliance that Paulina's marriage comes to symbolize not just outmoded or unwanted, but in fact inaccessible for Lucy. While the dispossessed orphan is, of course, an icon of the Victorian novel, and of Brontë's fiction in particular, Lucy represents a much rarer figure: someone who finds herself without any blood relatives, not just within the novel but also, as far as we know, existent in the world from which she comes, as the few unnamed "kinsfolk" with whom Lucy lives early in the novel vanish mysteriously in the fourth chapter. While Mrs. Bretton and Lucy share a kind of kinship with one another—Mrs. Bretton is her godmother—that connection is often thrown into relief by the cousin relations shared by Paulina and Ginevra, in addition to the marriage

of Paulina and Graham. (Indeed, Lucy frequently registers the subtle ways in which the Brettons fail to recognize her as or claim her as family, despite the fact that she often finds herself consigned to their care). Unlike Brontë's other, parentless heroines—Jane Eyre, but also Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone (at least in the opening chapters of *Shirley*)—and unlike the orphans who populate the vast majority of Victorian novels—Lucy alone finds herself outside of even an extended kinship network, a point underscored in this scene by the fact that the blood she spills belongs to, and can therefore be drawn by, her alone. [189]

If Paulina's conscription within a consanguine kinship network renders her interchangeable with the willing slave, then Lucy's radical alienation from that kinship model might be understood as a kind of freedom—one in which Lucy finds herself uniquely positioned to understand the constraints of affection as a bondage akin to slavery in a negative sense in a way that Paulina evidently does not. Indeed, when Lucy first discovers that M. Paul may be engaged to Justine Marie (a discovery that turns out to be false), she asks,

> Must I…render some account of that Freedom and Renovation which I had won on the fête-night? Must I tell how I and the two stalwart companions I brought home from the illuminated park bore the test of intimate acquaintance? I tried them the very next day. They had boasted their strength loudly when they reclaimed me from love and its bondage, but upon my demanding deeds, not words, some evidence of better comfort, some experience of a relieved life—Freedom excused himself, as for the present, impoverished and disabled to assist; and Renovation never spoke; he had died in the night suddenly…I found myself brought back captive to the old rack of suspense, tied down and strained anew. (528)

For Lucy, in other words, love is comparable to bondage because it represents not an expression of the will (as it does for Paulina), but rather a form of captivity. Even so, as the novel draws towards its close, Brontë suggests that Lucy has begun, finally, to mimic the very forms of binding affections that have defined Paulina as a characterological curiosity throughout the novel. On the eve of M.

[189] Other novels that feature orphaned protagonists who are either raised by or eventually reunited with kin to whom they are related "by blood" include: *Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Great Expectations*, *The Woman in White*, *Deerbrook*, *Michael Armstrong*. Becky Sharp of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* presents one notable exception to this rule.

Paul's departure for Guadeloupe, Lucy reports that, "Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart—I preferred him before all humanity" (542). Indeed, so overwhelming is M. Paul's "influence" that Lucy adopts not just Paulina's zealous affections but also her automated embodiment: "The secret of my success [in cultivating her new school] did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart. The spring which moved my energies lay far away beyond the seas, in an Indian isle. I had been left a legacy; such a thought for the present, such a hope for the future, such a motive for the persevering, a laborious, an enterprising, a patient and a brave course—I *could* not flag" (544). Like Paulina, whose body is animated, mechanistically, by the attentions of others, Lucy has become a kind of machine whose engine, or "spring," lies outside of herself, in the West Indies. If Lucy once feared losing herself to "love and its bondage," her adoption by M. Paul—who, unlike the relatives Lucy lacks, has granted her a "legacy"—has finally transformed her into the kind of subject for whom dependency is a happiness, and autonomy a form of expression directed by the external "spring" of emotion that compels her to action. And like Paulina before her, the result is a form of animation that borders on lifelessness, as Lucy explains: "I believe that scarce a living being so remembered, so sustained, dealt with in kind so constant, honourable, and noble, could be otherwise than grateful to the death" (544).

In the novel's concluding pages, however, Brontë subtly inverts the dynamics of mastery and bondage between Lucy and M. Paul, revealing that it is M. Paul, and not Lucy Snowe, who occupies the place of the willing slave in their unfulfilled marriage plot. While Lucy remains a Protestant at M. Paul's encouragement, M. Paul embraces his Catholicism, and the duties attached to him by his faithfulness to his fellow Catholic observants, Madame Beck, Père Silas, and Madame Walravens, by agreeing to sail to Guadeloupe and manage a colonial plantation. Attempting to defend this

decision—and M. Paul's attachment to Catholicism—Lucy explains:

> All Rome could not put him into bigotry, nor the Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit. He was born honest, and not false—artless, and not cunning—a freeman, and not a slave. His tenderness had rendered him ductile in a priest's hands, his affection, his devotedness, his sincere pious enthusiasm, blinded his kind eyes sometimes, made him abandon justice to himself to do the work of craft, and serve the ends of selfishness; but these are faults so rare to find, so costly to their owner to indulge, we scarce know whether they will not one day be reckoned among the jewels. (545)

In her introduction to the novel, Helen Cooper writes of this scene, "Maintaining her belief in the superiority of English Protestantism, Lucy can justify her love for M. Paul in that he is not 'a slave' to Catholicism. By this displacement she links M. Paul's voyage to Guadeloupe with slavery, by acknowledging his own freeborn status."[190] Yet the description of M. Paul's Catholic duty in fact portrays him as precisely that—a "slave" who is bound to the institution by coercions that are tender rather than violent, but coercive nonetheless. Rather than read this passage, as Cooper does, as a declaration of M. Paul's irrefutably "free" state, I would argue, on the contrary, that Brontë intends to illustrate the ways in which M. Paul's natural-born freedom has been taken over by the Catholic devotion that renders him not just tenderly devoted, but also, like Paulina, so "ductile" as to become an instrument to the unjust causes of Catholic "charity" on the one hand and French colonial slavery on the other. M. Paul may have been born free, in other words, but that freedom, like his natural honesty and artlessness, become abridged (if not fully washed away) by his love for the Church and his willingness to be spurred on by that love to work amidst the slave population of Guadeloupe. M. Paul's tender affections are thus "enslaving" in two registers here, as they bind not only M. Paul's figurative slavery to the Catholic religion, but also colonial subjects' literal slavery to a Catholic heiress, under a Catholic-ruled imperial state. More importantly, M. Paul comes to take Lucy's place as the figurative domestic slave who, not unlike Bertha Mason before him, finds himself sacrificed to the memory of slavery's injustices. Like Bertha, M. Paul belongs to a slaveholding class, and yet in

[190] Cooper, "Introduction," xlvi.

the novel's concluding pages, he is repainted as a figurative slave, first bound to an enslaving institution by his dutiful affections, and then destroyed by them. And like Bertha, this death provides a resolution to the contradiction between dependency and autonomy that has plagued the novel's romantic heroine, though the resolution that *Villette* offers is not the "domestic individualism" of *Jane Eyre*, but rather the radical solitude of Lucy Snowe, decisively foreclosed from both consanguine and conjugal kinship in the novel's close. In Brontë's letter to Williams, she stresses that it is M. Paul, and not Lucy Snowe, whose marriage plot ultimately risks the bondage of marital cruelty. The cause, in Brontë's letter, is Lucy's stubborn individuality—an individuality that would make marriage's binds a strain rather than a dissolving union. But as Brontë's novel suggests, M. Paul's slavery was scripted long before by his susceptibility to affections that match Paulina's in both their excess and their evacuation of will. What turns that slavery, finally, into a source of pain and a cause for catastrophe is that unlike Paulina, M. Paul risks marrying a character who remains singularly isolated from the bondages that attach to the novel's other characters, and therefore incapable of finding a place within the web of dependency and familiarity that binds the rest of the novel's characters to one another.

Paulina and M. Paul resemble one another in more than name, in other words. Rather, they mirror one another as figures for domestic slavery who resign themselves—willingly and faithfully—to various modes of figurative captivity and disappearance. In M. Paul's case, this conclusion is painted as a tragedy; in Paulina's case, a romance. But in both cases, their affections and the bondages those affections ultimately help affect are portrayed as relics of outmoded, and explicitly patriarchal networks of community and kin that thrive on the dependency, emotional susceptibility, and the long history shared between their members. As narrator, Lucy Snowe imagines the English family that Paulina and Graham together represent as a desirable form of willing submission, while she imagines the Catholic Church as a destructive one. The depiction Brontë's novel ultimately

leaves us with, however, is far more ambiguous, as it suggests that the "slaveries" shared by Paulina and M. Paul cannot, perhaps, be so easily distinguished. In her reading of *Villette*, Vlasta Vranjes argues that Paulina, who is frequently compared to a nun, comes to represent the ways in which coverture extends Catholic doctrine into the heart of the Anglo-Protestant marriage, by preserving and enshrining as English law policies concerning marital indissolubility inherited from the Catholic Church (and unique to England as a non-Catholic state).[191] But while the comparisons between Paulina and M. Paul that the novel invites might likewise point to the closely-knit bondages that Catholic dogma and English coverture laws together helped to create, those comparisons likewise indicate that those bondages can perhaps best be understood within an even longer history of the marriage plot, one in which Catholic duty and English marriage are linked together by their shared resemblance to familial forms of enslavement.

As a result, Brontë suggests that it is only by turning our attention to colonial slavery and its legacy in the modern world that the bondages forged by the twin institutions of marriage and the family can begin to be unraveled more fully. As I suggested above, Brontë's depiction of Paulina's "slavery" remains muted by the fact that that slavery comes to seem not only willing but pleasurable in the context of Paulina's successful marriage plot. Ultimately, then it is tempting to read this portrait of willing slavery as a blithe appropriation and misinterpretation of colonial slavery, one that turns slavery into a figure for investigating certain paradoxes of marriage reserved for free, white, English subjects, detached from the modern history of slavery in the Americas that would seem to remain outside of the novel's purview. But as I will argue in the next section, Brontë in fact draws attention to precisely this rift between Paulina's "white slavery," and history of black slavery this plot would seem to ignore, as Brontë suggests that Paulina's slavery can come to seem like a felicitous one specifically because of both her identification as an ethnically white British subject and her

[191] Vlasta Vranjes, "English Cosmopolitanism and/as Nationalism," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 324-347, JStor.

position within the whitened world of English domestic realism—a whiteness that Brontë explicitly dramatizes. In doing so, Brontë grafts onto the figurative vision of domestic slavery I've described above allusions to a racial "color system" that was rooted more firmly in the injustices of the colonial slavery system that these plots would at first seem largely to gloss over.

As I will argue in the next section, however, Paulina's "whiteness," and the system of racial perception to which it belongs works not to reify racial difference but to investigate how that system intersects with aesthetic experiences for both Lucy as narrator and for readers of *Villette*. One impetus of this investigation is to highlight the differences between Paulina's willing slavery plot and the colonial slavery system that weaves its way through the novel by heightening and drawing attention to distinctions between Paulina's "whiteness" and the non-white women who surround her. But another, and more important, impetus is to distinguish a world drawn in racial classifications of black and white from the vivid world into which Lucy gradually emerges, which is defined not by captivity to the domestic sphere, but instead by the captivation of aesthetic experience—a captivation that remains nonetheless tied in perhaps surprising ways to Lucy's apprehension of and possession by slavery's afterlife.

"The Vivid": Captivation and the Aesthetics of Slavery

If Brontë devotes a significant portion of *Villette* to holding up the marriage plot as a narrative of captivity—to the family, the Church, and to the outsized affections these institutions provoke—she does so in part to recast the novel's marriage plot as a historical relic that lives on in the present, but from which Lucy (and her readers) ultimately gain some critical distance. If Brontë affirms the connections between marriage and slavery that I explored in the previous chapter, she also joins Victorian anthropologists who will relocate those connections to a distant past. At the same time, the novel's concluding chapters, which witness M. Paul's departure onboard the "Paul et Virginie" bound for Guadeloupe—a journey fated to doom the marriage plot that Paul shares with

Lucy—invite readers to reconsider whether these connections can really be contained within the ancient past to which Brontë at first seems to consign them. In the section that follows, however, I will argue that what is significant about these layered allusions to "captivity" is not only the comparisons to modern slavery they invite, but also the ways in which Brontë ultimately urges readers to consider the limitations of these comparisons, and of the realist novel's capacity to apprehend and represent slavery within its pages. For alongside the traditional courtship plot, Brontë offers a narrative not of captivity but of captivation that invites readers to reconsider slavery's legacy and its imprint upon the Victorian marriage plot in new ways.

In this section, I use the term "captivation" to refer to those moments where style and slavery meet in Brontë's novel. Throughout *Villette*, Lucy finds herself drawn into scenes that invite her to experience and cultivate a taste for aesthetic pleasure through her interactions with materials ranging from paintings and performances to sartorial fashion and culinary indulgences—all of which Lucy finds the opportunity to "relish" as much to renounce. In this section, I will argue that these experiences are cast as a figurative form of spiritual "slavery," insofar as they risk holding subjects (and Lucy in particular) captive to the demands of the perceiving senses and, at times, of the work of art in itself. But while this figurative form of "enslavement" may seem to have little to do with the captivities of the marriage plot that I examined in the first half of this chapter, I argue that Brontë frames aesthetic captivation as a technique for interrogating slavery's legacy in two significant (and related) ways. In the first half of this section, I will argue that Brontë deploys what Rachel Teukolsky refers to as a "pictorial" mode of description in order to tell a story about the racial "color system" that maps onto and transforms Paulina's story of marital slavery by drawing attention to the fact that this story is in some senses about racial whiteness and white femininity in particular. In the second half of this section, I will argue that juxtaposed to this narrative about "whiteness" is a competing narrative about the captivation of "color" as a linked aesthetic and racial phenomenon. This specific

form of captivation might yield a very different mode for apprehending colonial slavery—one that replaces the anachronistic effects of Paulina's marriage plot with a presentist perspective towards slavery's legacy.

In the previous chapter, I examined a set of anthropological and feminist texts that relocated the bond between slavery and marriage to an ancient past that is imagined as both outside of and prior to the colonization of the West Indies and the development of the African slave trade. In *Villette*, Brontë similarly relocates this story to a similarly ancient past. This ancient past is centered, however, not in Greece or Rome but in a Celtic/Scottish landscape, where it is adopted into a history of what Katie Trumpener calls Britain's "internal colonialism," and therefore of the development of Britishness itself.[192] While it may at first seem as though Brontë simply recasts the complex web of slavery's global history as a story native to Britain, the better to adopt it as a subject for the English novel, the novel's aesthetic suggests that this recasting might be both more deliberate and more ironic than it at first appears. For while Brontë imagines the marriage plot as a "British" one, she also imagines it as a story painted in shades of white that continually call attention to themselves throughout the novel.

Brontë consistently casts the young, unmarried, and conventionally feminine women who surround Lucy in costumes whose whiteness features prominently, signaling (often in a form that even Lucy recognizes as hyperbolic) their purity, chastity, and, most importantly, their availability for participation in the marriage plot. As Lucy prepares for her first fête in honor of Mme. Beck, for example, she notes that "A clear white muslin dress, a blue sash (the Virgin's colours), a pair of white, or straw-coloured kid gloves—such was the gala uniform" (144), giving the effect of a "diaphanous and snowy mass" (145) as Lucy observes the preparations. The dresses Brontë describes here exemplify the features of an idealized whiteness that seems at once substantial—

[192] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), xiii.

reflecting light and collecting into a solid "mass"—and so bright and pale, as to become translucently "clear." At once visible and invisible, disembodied and visually impressive, the white uniform Brontë describes constructs a form of whiteness that can both be seen through and, at the same time, emerge into vision to highly stylized, and undeniably beautiful, effect. Later, Brontë suggests that this conspicuous whiteness is neither incidental nor purely symbolic, but rather an essential condition for the representation of the marriage plot in its most conventional form. When Lucy visits the portrait gallery that houses the infamous painting of the Cleopatra (to which I will return), she is steered away from that painting by M. Paul, who directs her towards a set of paintings depicting "La vie d'une femme" (225):

> They were painted rather in a remarkable style—flat, dead, pale, and formal. The first represented a 'Jeune Fille,' coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up—the image of a villainous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a 'Mariée' with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a 'Jeune Mère,' hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. (226)

No longer beautiful but "laids," the images nonetheless unspool a vision of female development painted overwhelmingly in tones of white. Mirroring Paulina's own progress from young woman to wife and young mother over the course of the novel, the portraits tie that progress to a white world in which diaphanous muslin and the smooth marble in which alabaster skin is so often rendered in Victorian novels transforms, unappealingly, into the chalky, decaying, and cheapened whiteness of plaster and clay. But while, for Lucy, these scenes portray a conventional and convention-bound femininity that is not just ugly and pernicious but also "dead," for Brontë, they also hyperbolize and thus call attention to the ways in which the outdated form of youth, marriage, and maternity that the Victorian marriage plot seemingly cannot help but follow is bound to—and, seemingly, bound by—whiteness itself.

By sliding between external forms (dresses and veils, but also sculptural materials such as

plaster and clay) and corporeal features (whites of eyes, "plastered" hands, and "clayey" skin), Brontë tempts readers to imagine this whiteness not merely as symbolic, but also as embodied, and therefore as a signifier for the epidermal whiteness that, in Victorian racial ideology, helps define the "white" race. At the same time, the methods she employs for doing so call into question the boundaries between skin color, cultivated appearance, and artistic effect, as body, costume, artwork, and literary metaphor blur. The ambivalence with which Brontë distinguishes the perception of epidermal "race" from aesthetic and literary effect is underscored by the fourth figure in the sequence: "a 'Veuve,' being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument, set up in a corner of some Père la Chaise" (226). Despite reporting the appearance of a "black woman" juxtaposed to the overwhelming whiteness of the portraits that have come before, Lucy quickly obscures the racial distinction she has just underlined by recasting the women in a shared aesthetic that mingles black and white, explaining that "All these four 'Anges' were grim and gray as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts" (226). White and black, and then gray and finally as colorless as vapor or ghosts, Lucy's perception moves between discerning racial difference and turning that difference—the juxtaposition of "white skin" and "black"—into a purely aesthetic effect, one that represents not race, but an outmoded image of the female form, that, cast in black and white, seems ossified by tradition and left to a lifeless past.

One way to understand not only the portraits, but also the motif of black-and-white that Brontë continually evokes to describe female figures (often within *tableau* of symbolic import, such as the fête or the allegorical portraits described above), then, is that they invite readers into a system of racial perception that they simultaneously destabilize, suggesting that their shades of white and black are proffered for aesthetic purposes rather than as signifiers of racial or ethnic meaning. The signifiers of racial difference thus become part of a complex riddle, one whose meaning can only be parsed by bracketing epidermal race, to see instead mere colors available for play in Brontë's

narrational palette. Racial difference and the distinctions between "white skin" and "black skin" upon which it depends thus come to seem part and parcel of the portraits' "flat" conventionality, which is depicted not only as unappealing or uninteresting, but as old fashioned and unrealistic. At the same time, the portraits invite us to read not only these images, but also the novel's twinned marriage plots themselves, along lines of racial difference. For while Paulina follows the story of youth, marriage, and maternity that the figures in white enjoy, Lucy alone concludes the novel in an approximation of widowhood, aligning her story of loss with that of the black woman who is left to stare upon an "elegant" French grave. Rather than reify or deconstruct racial difference, in other words, epidermal race acts as a system of meaning that continually emerges into and fades from view, inviting readers to consider its meaning for the novel even as it ironizes or refuses those meanings by absorbing them into a "purely" aesthetic world in which whiteness and blackness represent effects of color, light, and narrative description rather than lineage, blood, or biology. As I will argue later in this chapter, by the end of the novel, Brontë attempts to cast the racial color system into a past against which another, more vibrant color system emerges as a new, and more accurate mode of seeing.

But before she does so, Brontë plays with and calls attention to the aesthetics of race in order to raise questions about the relationship between the realities of colonial slavery and the captivity plot in which Paulina positions herself as a "willing" captive throughout the novel. As the portraits Lucy castigates suggest, Brontë likewise calls attention to Paulina (and the Bretton's) affiliation with all things white, light, and pale, in juxtaposition with Lucy's "clouded" existence. Narrating Paulina's engagement, and her enclosure within the captivities of the marriage plot (a specifically British "inheritance"), in a chapter titled "Sunshine," Brontë describes Paulina alternately as a pearl, a light, and a piece of ice, as she reflects light by turns substantively white, bright, and clear: Graham and Paulina's thoughts "often matched like carefully-chosen pearls…in her lover's

presence, [Paulina] glowed like some soft glad light…As to that gentle ice of hers…he brought with him a generous influence that soon thawed the timid, self-imposed restriction" (469). Like the dresses that impress Lucy at her first fête, Paulina appears to inhabit a multi-dimensional whiteness that is both visible and invisible, opaque and translucent, colorful and clear. Likewise, as the scene later draws to a close, Lucy reports that the engagement has proceeded "without any colouring of romance," and that it achieves its conclusion in a marriage in which "all dregs filtered away, the clear wine settled bright and tranquil" (482). In these scenes, in other words, Brontë turns Paulina, and the marriage to which she willingly assents, into a figurative embodiment of the paradox of "whiteness" as both aesthetic coloration and as racial feature, as that whiteness comes to seem at once substantial (and as aesthetically appealing as a pearl) and transparent, as whiteness cedes to the "clarity" of the conventional marriage plot itself. Yet the sheer quantity of terms that the passage amasses to make visible this "clear" property—"sunshine," "clear wine," "soft light," and crystalline "ice"—suggests that this colorless-coloration can never fully fade out of view, at least where Paulina's stunningly bright prospects are concerned. In the same way that Lucy's narration continually fails to make itself "transparent," so, too, do her attempts to "transparently" describe Paulina's marriage as a happiness make visible both Lucy's ironic treatment of that happiness, and the visible differences that mark out Paulina alone for a successful marriage plot within the scope of Brontë's novel. While those differences are myriad—her wealth, her attachment to her father, her beauty, and her canny willingness to give herself over entirely to others—those differences are filtered through and made visible in an overwhelming "whiteness" that matches the portraits in its indeterminate play of racial and artistic signification.

This particular mode of play is not unique to Brontë's novel. A recent anthology, *The Modern Girl Around the World*, traces the global development in the early twentieth century of the "modern girl," a figure who uses consumer goods such as make up and clothing to alter the surfaces of her

body, shaping an identity that is at once aestheticized, changeable, and therefore dramatically shaped both by personal choice and by international fashions that had come to be understood as conspicuously "modern." Significantly, this version of the "modern girl" implicates an aesthetics of racial difference on two interconnected levels, as she both openly joins a movement and a trend shared by other women of other races around the globe, and defines herself through play with the approximation of other racial identities. In her description of American instantiations of the "modern girl" in the 1920s and 1930s, Alys Eve Weinbaum argues that the modern girl was defined by her facility with "racial masquerade." For Weinbaum, the practices of racial masquerade indicate that "race was treated less as a biological posit than as a performance, posture, gesture, facade, or surface appropriable by she who possessed access to consumer culture—she who possessed the power to not only purchase but also to put on and take off the mask. This was a power to engage in consumption so as to exert mastery over racial inscription. In short, this was the power to purchase so as to demonstrate one's possession of American modernity."[193] Underwriting the intersection of consumption and self-cultivation Weinbaum describes here, however, is a set of assumptions about the visuals of racial difference and their value, simultaneously, as markers of biological difference and of aesthetic intrigue or beauty. In order to "purchase" or "put on" the signifiers of race, those signifiers must first become legible within a visual system that treats them as both the embodied signs of ethnic difference, and, at the same time, as transposable aesthetic features that can be evoked by a painterly stroke of rouge or a sculptural cut of cloth.

For Weinbaum and her fellow contributors, the play of racial, aesthetic, and commodity forms of visual play come together around the imitation and appropriation of difference. As Rachel Teukolsky's essay "White Girls: Avant-Gardism and Advertising After 1860" illustrates, however,

[193] Alys Weinbaum, "Racial Masquerade: Consumption and Contestation of American Modernity," *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 131.

this same confluence of racial, artistic, and consumer forms of visual culture also reshaped the meaning of "whiteness" in Victorian culture. Taking Whistler's avant-garde painting, *The White Girl* and Collins's sensation novel *The Woman in White* as works that share an interest in the formal possibilities of what she calls "sensational whiteness," Teukolsky argues that "Unlike the whiteness of neoclassical sculpture—disembodied, pure—sensational whiteness is embodied, textured, layered, consumable, even penetrable." While whiteness can serve as a sign for "the kind of aesthetic indeterminacy associated with modern art," in both Whistler and Collins's work it also became a multi-shaded form of coloration that "materialized female bodies for audience consumption." More importantly, Teukolsky suggests that whiteness enables the female figures painted in its tones to shift between modernist ambiguity and "sensational" corporeality, as the female subjects who once shared whiteness's associations with "purity, domesticity, and propriety" now come to share the features of a thicker, pictorial "whiteness" as, at once, sensational in its palpable materiality, modern in its implication of unreachable subjective depth, and yet curiously opaque or blank, as the women who inhabit Collins's novel come to seem "interchangeable."[194]

In the same way, Brontë offers a multi-hued or "thickened" aesthetic of whiteness that demands readers' attention as both a "pictorial" feature of the novel and as an indeterminate invitation to read that whiteness as alternately corporeally coded and as a marker of Paulina's curious subjectivity—at once so vacuous as to seem "clear" and, at the same time, so complicated in its expressions of willed self-abnegation as to seem both deep and inscrutable. But whereas in the example Teukolsky highlights, the position of the "white girl" can be occupied by women who are not identified as racially white (Teukolsky names the Mexican performer, Julia Pastrana, as one important example), in *Villette*, pictorial whiteness comes to signify a form of female subjectivity uniquely enmeshed with certain understandings of racial whiteness. While Paulina approximates the

[194] Rachel Teukolsky "White Girls: Avant-Gardism and Advertising After 1860," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 434.

position of the "willing" slave, that position can only be cast as a happy one by situating it within a British history, whose legacy is bodied forth by the Celtic/Scottish "blood" exchanged between Graham Bretton and Mr. Home, and by the British family this union helps perpetuate. Put another way, her story suggests that slavery becomes a form of pleasure when it is situated within a narrative of British history and therefore of the inheritance of racial whiteness. We might therefore take the novel's accumulated images of whiteness seriously as racial signifiers, whose appearance draws attention to the fact that while certain forms of complex female self-consciousness can co-exist with domestic slavery's captivities, that position is one exclusively defined by, and perhaps definitive of, a particular form of whiteness that is so essential that it risks slipping out of view by becoming translucent, and therefore transparently invisible to the novel we are reading.[195]

In drawing attention to Paulina's whiteness in this way, Brontë links the elemental clarity of bright white light that Paulina embodies to both the plot of willing captivity on the one hand, and to the "transparent" perspective of realist narration on the other. Building on these connections, we might in turn read the "clarity" provided by her marriage plot's resolution—a resolution that makes suddenly transparent both the underlying structures of alliance that still dictate conjugal marriage plots and the "formal" conventions of this novel, like other novels and like the "ugly" portraits Lucy castigates—as a reflection of the British novel's singular ability to filter the dominations of colonial

[195] The Vashti, the actress (based upon the Jewish actress Rachel) provides a useful counterexample. Like Paulina, Vashti is described in shades of both bright light and vivid whiteness. But unlike Paulina—and more like the modern "white girls" Teukolsky describes—her whiteness remains unfixed, as Lucy continually perceives her whiteness not as the absence of color but as its irrepressible return: "I expected bony harshness and grimness—something large, angular, sallow. What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame. … She stood not dressed, but draped in pale antique folds, long and regular like sculpture. A background and entourage and flooring of deepest crimson threw her out, white like alabaster—like silver: rather be it said, like Death" (286). Despite her attempts to fix Vashti's body as in the colorless and seamless white of antique stone, Lucy continually re-imagines that whiteness in other shades: blue twilight, orange flame, silver alabaster, underscoring her perceived status as both Jewish and a radically individuated female performer, and therefore non-white.

history into a form designed to represent, instead, the felicity of the English courtship plot, reimagining black captivity as an expression of a specifically white female will. While Brontë never explicitly questions Paulina's sunny fate, she does question whether such a fate is available outside of the material comfort and familial connections (and the verifiable lineage those connections secure) that we might read as a defining feature of Paulina Home's "whiteness" in the novel. Indeed, at some moments in the novel it can seem as though familial comfort, novelistic realism, and aesthetic pallor are congenitally related to one another. When Lucy finds herself once again in the Bretton home after her collapse at the end of Volume One, she describes the Bretton home as a picturesque scene rendered in conspicuously pale shades:

> My calm little room seemed somehow like a cave in the sea. There was no colour about it, except that white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water; the blanched cornice was adorned with shell-shaped ornaments, and there were white mouldings like dolphins in the ceiling-angles. Even that one touch of colour visible in the red satin pincushion bore affinity to coral; even that dark, shining glass might have mirrored a mermaid. When I closed my eyes, I heard a gale, subsiding at last, bearing upon the house-front like a settling swell upon a rock-base. I heard it drawn and withdrawn far, far off, like a tide retiring from a shore of the upper world—a world so high above that rush of its largest waves, the dash of its fiercest breakers could sound down in this submarine home, only like murmurs and a lullaby. (202-3)

The Bretton home, like Paulina's narrative, emerges in shades of white so pale as to seem at first devoid of color. This pallid scene is significant, first, because it exemplifies the conventions of Victorian realist description, lavishing attention upon an interior space filled with objects that stand out for both their narrative elaboration and for their seeming superfluity, signaling on their surface little other than the ostentatious comforts of the Bretton home. Forming a diptych with the novel's closing shipwreck scene—a scene marked, by contrast, by spectacular sweeps of purple and red—Brontë's description here compactly emblematizes not just the tranquility of the Bretton family's domestic comfort and their affiliation with the whiteness that characterizes scenes of familial alliance and marital fulfillment throughout the novel, but also in some senses realist description itself—a narrative style that ordinarily competes with Lucy's own occasionally reticent, obfuscating, and

surrealistic modes of perception. More importantly, in this description, Lucy imagines a very different kind of oceanic scene than the one we find at the novel's conclusion. In this pastel scene, the sea represents the cozy interiors of a British domesticity that may be surrounded by and shipped across the sea, but that, in its picturesque pallor, remains almost hyperbolically sealed against the tragedies with which the Atlantic will come to be associated by the novel's end. In this scene, in other words, the whiteness that shades Paulina's narrative comes to pervade realist narrative in itself, sealing within its bounds certain strands of plot and clans of characters against an omnipresent but unnamed storm that, in Lucy's description, rages just beyond the white walls of the Bretton home.

Taken together, the connections between domestic comfort, familial alliance, realist description, and the aesthetic and racial variants of "whiteness" that I have described above suggest that the marriage plot in which Paulina finds herself—and which Lucy and M. Paul for a short time seem poised to approximate—marks off that plot and the story of willing captivity it contains as a representation not of colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, or the African settings of Brontë's juvenilia, but rather of the Anglo-British world of whiteness from which Lucy finds herself excluded in subtle ways from the moment she enters the Bretton home. If Brontë embraces the trope of the "willing" slave as a figure for the Victorian wife, in other words, she does so in part to indicate that slavery can only be construed "willing" in the context of a specifically white, Anglo-European milieu. To experience the pleasures of willing slavery thus remains open only to characters who possess certain qualities (embeddedness within the family, financial security, and a facility in performing an elaborate and contradictory form of self-denial) that, taken together, might supplement and supplant skin color as the markers of "whiteness" in the novel.

If we consider, as I have been suggesting, *Villette* to be an important predecessor for Teukolsky's "women in white" and the conjunction of avant-garde modernism and popular sensationalism those white figures represent, it would seem only natural to expect Lucy Snowe, and

not Paulina Home, to serve as the novel's emblematic "white girl"—a position forecast by her very surname. But as Brontë suggests, Lucy's relationship to the world of "white slavery" that Paulina happily inhabits seems foreclosed—by Lucy's queerness, by her radical alienation from familial ties, and by her resistance to the "influence" of affection that she satirizes in her depictions of Paulina and M. Paul's slavish affections for others.[196] By inviting us to compare Lucy to the widow whose racial identity sets her apart from the whitened women in the earlier portrait sequence, the novel similarly invites us to see Lucy's radical solitude, her melancholic experiences of loss, and the unique form of female independence those losses engender as experiences that might be categorized under the sign of racial blackness in the same way that Paulina's conventionality and her acquiescence to the novel's marriage plot comes to seem decisively "white." But I want to suggest that Brontë also complicates attempts to transform her narrative into one defined by a straightforward system of racial difference, in favor of depicting a more complex interplay between racial and aesthetic modes of "coloration" that resists this kind of racial categorization. In the section that follows, I will argue that Lucy's difference is registered not so much through her identification with the racial otherness strictly speaking, but rather through her fascination with the more complexly defined category of "color" and with the realm of embodiment color represents—a fascination that limns the borders between racializing vision and aestheticism, as well as the borders between subjective will and willed subjection. In this way, Brontë re-animates the questions of dependency and independence, submission and autonomy that define Paulina as a character, but she does so through an investigation not of marital captivity but of the captivations produced by the intertwined registers of racial and aesthetic perception.

[196] As Sharon Marcus explains in her reading of Lucy's queer desire, Lucy's social alienation and her resistance to affection—what Marcus describes as her "unamiability"—are part and parcel of that desire (102-8).

In his reading of the novel, James Buzard argues that it is Lucy's "desire to be wholly uninscribed by culture, invisible to its circle of gazes, a blank page, 'pure as the driven snow,'" and that this desire, (defined as English or "Saxon") drives Lucy to "approximate the position she finally occupies as the narrator of her tale, when she takes up the position of no position, the state of being the light by which we see but not an object to be seen."[197] For all that Lucy renounces her position as a character possessed of both a material body and a legible psyche, the position Buzard describes ultimately belongs not to Lucy but to Paulina, who embodies not only the "state of being light," but also the translucence required of a truly "transparent" narrator. By contrast, Lucy continually fails in her drive to seem like no-body, just as she finds that her attempts to remain unseen are thwarted by her strange tendency to become not just visible but visibly embodied in spite of herself.[198] Significantly, Brontë defines Lucy's status as an "object to be seen" as a feature of her character that emerges through play with modes of embodiment that mirror the narrative's larger slippage between racializing and aestheticizing modes of "color." But while we might expect Lucy's play with color to mimic the appropriative aesthetics of the independent "modern girl" that Weinbaum describes, I will argue that, instead, this play marks, first, a much more ambivalent selfhood that explicitly echoes the subjections of slavery and, second, a mode of perception that ultimately grants both Lucy and the novel's readers a very different relation to slavery and to its racial history than this model of appropriation would seem to grant.

If Paulina embodies light, Lucy of course embodies shadow—a point she underscores early in the novel when, looking on the "diaphanous and snowy mass" of white dresses described above,

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[197] James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 266.

[198] Take, for example, Ginevra's pronouncement to Lucy: "If you really are the nobody I once thought you, you must be a cool hand." Lucy responds: ""The nobody you once thought me!' I repeated, and my face grew a little hot" (341). Lucy can neither remain the "nobody" Ginevra once mistook her for, nor "cold" as snow, leaving us instead with the image of her face, not only irrepressibly visible but "hot"—and therefore not snowlike at all.

she reports, "I well remember feeling myself to be a mere shadowy spot on a field of light; the courage was not in me to put on a transparent white dress" (145). What follows, however, is a scene that underscores not her "shadowy" darkness, but instead the way in which that darkness continually gives way to color: "…something thin I must wear—the weather and rooms being too hot to give substantial fabrics sufferance, so I had sought through a dozen shops till I lit upon a crape-like material of purple-gray—the colour, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom" (145). Though she insists that "in this same gown of shadow, I felt at home and at ease; an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking" (145), that description seems curious given that her description of the dresses invokes the undeniably "striking" tones of "a moor in bloom," layered not by heavy "shadow" but by the mistier substance of "dun mist." While much can be made of the infamous pink dress that Lucy finds herself forced into later in the novel, this purple dress seems designed to resist calling attention to itself and, by extension, to Lucy. Yet Brontë's description, and its confusion of "shadow" and coloration, ought to alert us to the fact that its concealments in fact invite further discernment, as Brontë asks that we look for the gradations of color hidden beneath a dress that might otherwise seem so dark as to be invisible.

In *The Literate Eye*, Rachel Teukolsky argues that color theory occupied a significant place in the early Victorian art world. More specifically, Teukolsky demonstrates that debates around the use and perception of color often centered around the questions about the extent to which the interplay between material objects and bodily sensation determined notions of "beauty," as opposed to the "divinely appointed, moral response to beauty" with which Victorian aesthetics, and Ruskin in particular, have largely come to be associated. In response to new developments in physiology, and particularly physiological psychology, the body came to occupy a newly central position in Victorian

conceptions of aesthetic response.[199] Teukolsky explains, "While Kant had made aesthetic judgment the opposite of physical desire, the discovery of perception's biological nature inaugurated a new strand of aesthetics, where the pleasures of the eye and mind were dictated by the body."[200] But while the body became central to artistic response, its centrality also became a source of anxiety for Victorian reviewers who resisted this materialist view of aesthetic perception.[201] In her vivid descriptions of dresses and costumery throughout *Villette*, Brontë both picks up on these concerns and extends them, by depicting dresses as "swathes of color" that make the materiality of the body palpable even as they clothe and conceal it, particularly for Lucy, who finds herself unable to pull off the "transparent" forms that belong to the novel's other female characters.

Indeed, cloth—dresses, but also drapes—often stand in for human forms, particularly those female forms from which Lucy often hyperbolically attempts to avert her gaze. When Graham asks Lucy to undress Paulina after she has been injured in a theater fire, instructing her that "She must be touched very tenderly," Lucy immediately redirects her attention to the "touch" of colorful fabrics hanging around the room: "The chamber was a room shadowy with pale-blue hangings, vaporous with curtainings and veilings of muslin; the bed seemed to me like a snow-drift and mist—spotless, soft, and gauzy. Making the women stand apart, I undressed their mistress, without their well meaning but clumsy aid" (292). Rather than detail the body that Lucy finds herself undressing, she instead focuses her attention on the cloth forms that surround it, which both stand in for and make

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[199] Rachel Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 52.

[200] Ibid.

[201] For example, describing responses Turner's work, which "[used] paint so as to emphasize its materiality on the canvas," Teukolsky argues that while his "blurry swathes of color" have come to be understood as an early example of modernist abstraction, for Victorian reviewers, they were more often comparable to "foodstuffs," insofar as they conjured an aesthetic "where human appetites and hunger might be dangerously mixed with more elevated pleasures" (52). See also Mershon, footnote 172 above.

palpable the body whose memory she, in her retelling, erases. In contrast to the icy transparency she will later adopt, here Paulina's body becomes present in its "spotless, soft, and gauzy" form through Brontë's lavish descriptions of the color and shapeless fabric forms that surround and replace that body.

But while Paulina occasionally takes on the form of a body made palpably material by the confusion of color, fabric, and "gauzy" form that Brontë describes here, that form belongs, far more often, to Lucy and to the various racialized women who provide a mirror for her materialized status throughout the novel. When, for example, Lucy at first refuses to put on the pink dress Mrs. Bretton has purchased for her, she protests "feeling that I would almost as soon clothe myself in the costume of a Chinese lady of rank" (231), as the opportunity to inhabit a colorful costume cedes to the anxiety of inhabiting a position of racial otherness, collapsing vibrant pigment, fabric, and race onto one another as shared properties of the ostentatiously "colorful" aesthetic that Lucy perceives when confronted with the dress. Put another way, vivid coloration becomes a signifier, throughout the novel, of a materiality of the body tied to racial otherness or "blackness," in contrast to the pallid and, eventually, transparent "whiteness" with which Paulina becomes associated. By revealing the ways in which Lucy's "shadowy" or "clouded" form becomes not darkly invisible but instead vividly colorful, Brontë not only underscores Lucy's penchant for the very spectacle she so often renounces, but also suggests that her affiliations with the novel's non-white women might be understood not merely in the registers of loss, alienation, and abandonment that the figure of the "widow" earlier suggested, but also in a register of aesthetic enjoyment (and self-enjoyment) that this "shadowed" existence grants Lucy in particular. If Paulina becomes the "light" that Buzard describes, it is Lucy who becomes the "object to be seen," through her ambivalent separation from the closures of the marriage plot and of a feminine "whiteness" that Brontë casts at once as happy, desirable, and yet confined to an outmoded past. By depicting Lucy as a character who adopts not

only the "shadowy" darkness but also the "colorful" form of the "Chinese lady of rank," the Jewish Vashti, the gipsy Cleopatra, and the black widow as models for her own vividly, if reluctantly, visible position as the novel's protagonist, we might be tempted to read Lucy as an appropriative figure akin to the "modern girl" Weinbaum describes, who participates in an aestheticized "racial masquerade" in order to define her autonomy as a self-possessed white woman. But I want to argue, on the contrary, that in Brontë's portrayal, these moments of mirroring and of play with the materials of fabric and flesh that define the aestheticized female figure in the novel are never quite as free as this framework would suggest.

If Brontë depicts affection as a form of "influence" that risks turning love into a performance of subjection, she likewise imagines Lucy's responses to aesthetic objects as a kind of subjugation not to other people, but rather to aesthetic objects themselves. The interplay between influence and performance that defines Paulina's affections could also be said to describe Lucy's response to "The Cleopatra," the painting that Lucy pauses over inside of the picture galleries in the second volume of the novel. In her description of the painting, Brontë at first turns the Cleopatra into a figure for the palpably (and, for Lucy, distasteful) materiality of the racialized female body, describing her as a "huge, dark-complexioned gipsy-queen" (224), a "commodity of bulk," and an "affluence of flesh" (223). In doing so, she weaves through Lucy's perception of the portrait categories of epidermal blackness, luxury, and commodity consumption that are mark the modern trade in slaves. Indeed, Lucy's description of the painting continually confuses the objects that the Cleopatra owns or consumes and the spectacle of her body, so that she moves, holographically, between the possessor of a series of excessively luxurious material objects and a luxury object available for possession and consumption. Lucy reports, for example, that "She was indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height" (223), deliberately confusing, for readers,

the meat the Cleopatra consumes and the meat of her excessively fleshly body. Moreover, like her later descriptions of Paulina's undressing, Lucy's descriptions of the Cleopatra's reclining posture invite readers to confuse and extend the material of her corpus to the "abundance of material" fabrics that drape her and extend onto the floor: "She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material—seventy-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment. …and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch and cumbered the floor" (223-4). Rather than cover her exposed body (a body whose nudity is, once again, underscored by Lucy's attempts to focus her attention on the cloth that insufficiently covers her), the drapery and curtains mimic her body's supine position, extending and amplifying her corporeality by blurring it together with the abundant drapes that fill the frame. Cleopatra's exposure, her spectacularized body, and her pleasurable sensuality invites consumption, and therefore risks commodification, suggesting that the sensuous enjoyment of material objects invites the transformation of subject into object—or the commodified person of the slave.

The Cleopatra's figurative allusions to slavery become more complex, however, if we consider them in light of Lucy's own relation to the painting she observes. Following this immersive description of the painting, Lucy recalls,

> I was sitting wondering at it (as the bench was there, I thought I might as well take advantage of its accommodation), and thinking that while some of the details—as roses, gold cups, jewels, &c.—were very prettily painted, it was on the whole an enormous piece of claptrap; the room, almost vacant when I entered, began to fill. Scarcely noticing this circumstance (as, indeed, it did not matter to me) I retained my seat; rather to rest myself than with a view to studying this huge, dark-complexioned gipsy-queen; of whom, I soon tired, and betook myself for refreshment to the contemplation of some exquisite little pictures of still life: wild flowers, wild-fruit, mossy wood-nests, casketing eggs that looked like pearls seen through clear green sea-water; all hung modestly beneath that coarse and preposterous canvass. (224)

Moments later, Lucy's observations are interrupted by M. Paul, who accuses her of indecency for enjoying the picture of the Cleopatra alone in a crowded gallery. Lucy's description betrays that,

without knowing, she has come to imitate Cleopatra's posture, as she rests comfortably on a bench, taking in first the "prettily painted" flowers and jewels that surround the Cleopatra, and then the host of more diminutive still lifes below that, despite their apparent naturalism and modesty, still invite Lucy to mentally replace eggs with pearls. Exhausted, overcome by, and finally fallen under the sway of "The Cleopatra," Lucy appears to us engaged in a subtle and unconscious mimicry of both her supine pose and her unrepentant consumption of beautiful objects, before finding that she, like the Cleopatra, has become not just spectator but spectacle, a reclining woman under the gaze of a roomful of museum goers, including M. Paul, who takes the opportunity to censure her almost as vehemently as she has censured the Cleopatra. In fact, Lucy has alerted us to her tendency to fall prey to the "influence" of aesthetic objects—an influence that mimics the same slavery to the senses for which she castigates the Cleopatra.[202] In the process of describing Cleopatra as a slave, Brontë also transforms "The Cleopatra" into a masterful aesthetic object—one that inspires in Lucy precisely the kind of mimic performance that defined Paulina's "slavishness" earlier in the novel. Indeed, Lucy describes the act of aesthetic appreciation as one that dominates and exhausts her, explaining earlier in the scene that,

> In the commencement of these visits, there was some misunderstanding and consequent struggle between Will and Power. The former faculty exacted approbation of that which it was considered orthodox to admire; the latter groaned forth its utter inability to pay the tax; it was then self-sneered at, spurred up, and goaded on to refine its taste, and whet its zest. The more it was chidden, however, the more it wouldn't praise. Discovering gradually that a wonderful sense of fatigue resulted from these conscientious efforts, I began to reflect whether I might not dispense with that great labour, and concluded eventually that I might, and so sank supine into a luxury of calm before ninety-nine out of a hundred exhibited frames. (222)

Like the Cleopatra, in other words, Lucy finds that works of art invite her into the very circuit of consumption and subjection that marks Cleopatra's status as, simultaneously, a female body, art

[202] In this sense, Lucy's position echoes Wollstonecraft's description of pleasure, in which she argues that "to their senses, are women made slaves" (154).

object, and specter of slavery. And the result is that Lucy herself becomes not just a spectacle, but another "object to be seen." For Lucy, in other words, the aesthetic encounter mirrors affection as a form of pleasure that overtakes and moves the body, turning her into a mimic performer. In her re-performance of Cleopatra's peculiar form of racialized and commodified femininity, we might find, then, a similar echo of Paulina's parodic performances. Where we might expect Lucy's aesthetic encounters to offer a more autonomous subjectivity, freed from the forms of influence and subjection that define Paulina's constrained position, we find instead that aesthetic experience remains haunted by, and a reduplication of, the very figurative slaveries with which we might expect it to contrast. Like the pleasures of affection, the pleasures of aesthetic experience ultimately come to seem like another form of "dependency" from which Lucy only partially desires to be free.

In this sense, Lucy's captivation with, and her seemingly uncontrollable urge to mimic, put on, and wrap herself in the vivid shades, shapeless (or "supine") forms, and palpable pleasures of the aesthetic realm mirrors the captive pleasures of the marriage plot, while at the same time developing a distinct experience of "subjection" to beautiful objects (bound to desire, but not, clearly, the desire of the heterosexual marriage plot). Benjamin Morgan has argued that Victorian aestheticism (and Paterian aestheticism in particular) ought to be understood as a discourse devoted not to affirming the subject's free will through his relation to "autonomous" aesthetic objects, but rather to investigating the ways in which that will is both held captive to and made legible within the world of embodiment to which beautiful objects likewise belong. Morgan writes,

> One of the most important claims in both Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Hegel's *Aesthetics* is that the artwork offers us access to an experience of freedom, either by lifting the rules that usually govern judgment or by introducing the freedom of speculation into the material world. Paterian aestheticism is aesthetic in precisely these terms: that is, as an investigation, based upon affective response, of the extent to which our experience of freedom and capacity for autonomous self-direction are real. Pater, however, departs from enlightenment and romantic aesthetics by suggesting that beauty dominates us and prevents us from experiencing the sort of

freedom that Kant or Hegel describes.[203]

On the contrary, he argues that Pater "figures materiality as enchainment and beauty as tyranny," and that he ultimately imagines that "aesthetic experience is utter submission to the dominating force of physical impressions."[204] For Morgan, this position remains distinct from Pater's "textual encoding of homoeroticism," but for Brontë (as, presumably, for Pater), the two are in fact inextricable: Lucy's captivation with the world of color that defines her distinctive subjectivity throughout the novel, and her occasional sensation that this world has "overtaken" her, remain clearly linked not only to her general difference from those characters who willingly follow the conventional forms of the realist novel's marriage plots, but also to her attempts to thwart, distract from, and ultimately reveal her fascination with the corporeality and colorful attractions of female form. What makes Brontë's version of this aestheticism distinctive, however, is the way in which she ties this subjection to the world of beautiful "objects" to the specter of slavery that haunts the novel throughout.

Brontë's most explicit discussions of the relationship between aesthetic beauty and the experience of enslavement come from Lucy's denigrations of Roman Catholic "sensualism." As Lucy first becomes acquainted with the Pensionnat, for example, she reports that:

> …great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers: a subtle essence of Romanism pervaded every arrangement: large sensual indulgence (so to speak) was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint. Each mind was being reared in slavery, but to prevent reflection from dwelling on this fact, every pretext for physical recreation was seized and made the most of. There, as elsewhere, the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. 'Eat, drink, and live!' she says. Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me. (141-2)

Later in the novel, as she witnesses yet another Catholic fête, Lucy explains that "Many

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[203] Benjamin Morgan, "Aesthetic Freedom: Walter Pater and the Politics of Autonomy," *ELH* 77, no. 3 (2010): 733, Project Muse.

[204] Ibid., 739, 740.

people…have felt this display impressive, have declared that though their Reason protested, their Imagination was subjugated. I cannot say the same. Neither full procession, nor high mass, nor swarming tapers, nor swinging censers, nor ecclesiastical millinery, nor celestial jewellery, touched my imagination a whit. What I saw struck me as….grossly material, not poetically spiritual" (466). As her descriptions betray, however, it is difficult to distinguish the "grossly material" from the pleasures of aesthetic and poetic experience, as the flowers, candlelight, scents, costumes, jewellery, food, and physical movement that here become forms of excessive indulgence elsewhere come to define Brontë's own highly stylized prose, which mines each of these categories of sensualism in turn for their descriptive and metaphorical effect, from the "bloom" of Lucy's gray dress to Paulina's status as a well-matched "pearl," to the pastries Lucy consumes just before she steps out on stage to perform, with "relish," in a play in the novel's opening volume. And yet, as I have suggested above, even as these forms of sensual experience shape the novel, they do so precisely as experiences of figurative enslavement for Lucy, insofar as she they automate, dominate, and shape her in response. While Lucy may manage to avoid the "influence" of Catholic sensualism that makes Mme. Beck, M. Paul, and others into *Catholic* "slaves," just as she ultimately evades the closures of the marriage plot, she cannot, it seems, avoid the force of stylized objects—a force that similarly overtakes the "tranquil" and "transparent" stylization of that marriage plot throughout *Villette*.

Throughout much of the novel, the relationship between style and slavery remains figurative and, often, faint. While Brontë associates conventional marriage with a "whiteness" to which she counterposes a more stylized narrative that focuses equally on color and on the embodiment of the racialized women like the Cleopatra or the Vashti who appear in conjunction with those richly colorful scenes, their connection to the colonial slavery system remains more metaphorical than literal throughout much of the novel. That relationship shifts, however, in the novel's concluding scene. As Brontë describes the shipwreck that finally destroys M. Paul and the ship on which he

travels across the Atlantic, the shared world of aesthetics, race, and slavery overwhelms both Lucy and the novel's sense of narrative time. Once again, we are faced with the mode of will-less "captivation" that defines not only Catholic dogma but also aesthetic experience throughout the novel. Significantly, however, the vision that the novel offers in this concluding scene is directed not towards Catholic ritual, a work of art, or even the female form, as it is elsewhere in the novel, but rather towards a scene of tragic destruction staged along the sea routes that connect England and Europe to the slave colonies abroad.

In the novel's closing paragraphs, as Lucy begins to recount her memories of M. Paul's fatal shipwreck, her narration moves indeterminately between past, present, and future. Beginning in the present tense, she quickly cuts in just two sentences between the autumn "equinox" and November "frost," before moving on to present a full description of the storm that finally overtakes his ship:

> The skies hang full and dark—a rack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms—arches and broad radiations; there rise resplendent mornings—glorious, royal, purple as monarch in his state; the heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest—so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride. I know some signs of the sky; I have noted them ever since childhood. God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it! (545)

In contrast to the tranquil "sea cave" found inside the Bretton home, where every detail resolves itself into a recognizable form, cast in the picturesque tones of white and sea foam green that characterize the "realistic" sea, Brontë focuses instead here on the abstract shapes of "clouds cast…into strange forms," rendered not in white or blue, but in the more vivid (and less realistic) shades of monarchical purple and blood red that similarly characterize Ruskin's description of Turner's slave ship scene. By shifting into the present tense, Brontë suggests that this scene is not just impressive but capable of suspending and disordering time itself. Indeed, the experience that Brontë describes so overwhelms Lucy's senses as to permanently transform them, as she later explains that "when the sun returned, his light was night to some!" (546). The storm and resulting

wreck that Lucy imagines herself witnessing here, in other words, does not just overtake her field of vision, but changes it, such that distinctions between past and present, light and dark blur and become inverted for her.

In its capacity to break apart the conventions of time and narrative perception, we might describe this scene (as Ruskin describes Turner's stormy sea) as sublime.[205] Yet I want to argue that Brontë explicitly discourages this reading in the novel's conclusion. As the scene comes to a close, Lucy interrupts her description by instructing herself to "Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life" (546). If the sublime is defined as an experience of terror whose captivations are underscored by the knowledge that the viewer remains at a safe distance, and that her experience will end with the satisfactions of precisely the "wondrous reprieve from dread" that Brontë describes here, then that experience is one that Lucy refuses, leaving the exhilaration—and the aesthetic distance—of sublimity to those naïve readers who are left (like Paulina and Graham) to bask in sunshine rather than dwell in shadow.

The scene that unfolds stages, of course, the destruction of a ship bound across the Atlantic from Guadeloupe to Labassecour—a destruction that comes, Brontë notes, from a "wild south-west storm" that mirrors the slavery colonies' location to the south and west of England and of Europe. In her description of the storm, Brontë describes M. Paul's drowning in violent terms, imagining that the storm "did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks…till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance" (546). Yet in her letter to Williams, she reimagines this violent act of consumption as a form of mercy, one that saves Paul from the pain and mastery at the hands of the

[205] My reading of this scene draws on Margaret Cohen's discussions of sublimity, desublimation, and modernist depictions of the sea in *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2010) 106-131.

rigidly "individual" Lucy Snowe that await him on shore. In these descriptions, Brontë not only describes the destruction of a ship that, travelling along the routes of the slave trade, was also likely a participant, but also calls forth the afterlives of slaves who, drowned at sea, escaped the "cruel-hearted" intimacies of the slavery system that likewise awaited them on shore. In this epistolary retelling, marriage once again comes to seem like a form of slavery, but the alternative is neither freedom nor independence. For M. Paul, the alternative is a drowning that comes to seem "just" in two senses, as it both "rescues" him from marriage to Lucy and functions as a spectacular punishment for the part he comes to take in the trade in slaves.[206]

For Lucy, however, the alternative to marital captivity is not a literal drowning but the sensorial flooding produced by the vivid image Brontë describes. In its collapsing of past, present, and future, the passage closes on a vision of Lucy trapped within its endless repetition. On the one hand, the scene distinguishes Lucy not only as autonomous in her uniquely (for a Victorian heroine) single status, but also as an aesthete in her embrace of a form of perception that is vivid and colorful. On the other, the scene amplifies the novel's earlier depictions of aesthetic experience as not just overwhelming but also dominating, as agency is replaced by an uncontrollable response to its heavily stylized visual and sonic impressions.

In *Specters of the Atlantic*, Ian Baucom compares Turner's *Slavers* to the historical novels of Walter Scott, arguing that Turner, like Scott, "invites us to watch, sympathize, and then move on, to compose ourselves (and our liberal virtue, worldly virtuosity, and virtuoso disinterestedness) as an effect of the *idea* of our witness to the sufferings of another."[207] For Baucom, the painting also issues an "invitation to lay down in the grave of the dying and the dead" and to act on that radical

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[206] Cooper argues that this scene represents both a punishment for slavery's crimes and an opportunity for Brontë to dissociate Lucy from those crimes by ensuring that she will not have to bear the legacy of M. Paul's colonial excursion in her marriage to him.

[207] Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 295-6.

"identification," but that demand will always be overtaken by the distance—and disinterestedness—that the painting ultimately relies upon, and the historical containments that distance creates.[208] Brontë's concluding scene, and the spectacular destruction of the slave ship it contains, might be said to do just the opposite, explicitly denying the desire for "the rapture of rescue from peril," and the fantasy that the "tempest" could ever come to an end, in favor of a form of an imagined engagement with slavery that, placed outside of time, is unending. While the fact of slavery goes unnamed, the spectacle of destruction, cruelty, and punishment that stands in its place keeps its traces before us, suspended in a scene that refuses firm distinctions between past and present, future and past. Brontë does not, of course, offer the radical "identification" with the slave that Baucom imagines. But in its place, she offers something distinctive: an invitation to imagine Lucy as a character who, captivated by slavery's history, becomes a captive to it, caught in the unresolved and open-ended temporality of the novel's ending, where she is neither free nor enchained in marriage, but instead bound to re-imagine a colonial scene she cannot quite narrate or draw to a conclusive end. Slavery's forms are ever present, but their presence can best be depicted in an aesthetic and temporal upheaval foreign to the linear temporality of the realist, English novel Lucy ostensibly inhabits.

In this way, the colorful perception that, as a closet aesthete, Lucy alone is granted comes to seem both potentially enslaving and, at the same time, a lens through which the connection between the concrete realities of the slavery colony and slavery's lingering, diffuse effects on the present and future can be, finally, apprehended. While the novel does not offer ethical judgment, it does offer to make visible—in some cases, vibrantly so—the strands of the slave past that have given shape to both Lucy and Paulina's experiences in the novel. In the same way, the appeal of color, the play of light and darkness, and the attraction to fabric and material forms that Lucy rediscovers again and

[208] Ibid., 295.

again throughout the novel are what grant her the ability to discern a racialized world in which epidermal racial difference is neither reified nor deconstructed, but rather hovers indeterminately over the novel's many permutations of slavery's legacy in the modern world. While aestheticism offers no opportunity to depict the realities of colonial slavery, nor to erase the perception of racial difference that colonial slavery has helped bequeath to the modern world Lucy inhabits, it does provide new ways of apprehending slavery's past and reimagining its legacy for the future—a legacy that might be said to include the novel's own outré aesthetic and the scene of destruction that aesthetic seems uniquely positioned to represent. That this mode of discernment belongs to Lucy alone suggests, moreover, that the ability to apprehend the slave past and its shaping influence on the present might be tied to the development of female self-consciousness that, while at times dominated, remains opposed to the closures of the marriage plot.

Early in the novel, as Lucy leaves London for Labassecour, she describes a scene that we might take as a kind of metaphor for the legacy this closing scene imagines. As Lucy is taken out to meet the ship that will whisk her away to Europe, she recalls:

> Black was the river as a torrent of ink: lights glanced on it from the piles of building round, ships rocked on its bosom. They rowed me up to several vessels; I read by lantern-light their names painted in great, white letters on a dark ground. 'The Ocean,' 'The Phoenix,' 'The Consort,' 'The Dolphin,' were passed in turns; but 'The Vivid' was my ship, and it seemed she lay further down. (56)

For Lucy, the novel that follows is one cast in a visual vocabulary of black and white that is determined as much by the slave past as by sunlight and shadow. Brontë's aim, however, like Lucy's, is to emerge from this black and white world, and from the straightforward racial history it might be said to allegorize, into a more "vivid" world—one that can make present slavery's shadowy afterlives even if it remains unable to render them in faithful detail.

Chapter Four
"Dancing on the Dead": Performances of Slavery on the Victorian Stage and in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*

Fictions of American Life

In an 1875 letter to George Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood, concerning Eliot's forthcoming novel *Daniel Deronda*, George Henry Lewes mentions in passing that a "hint as to the subject" of the novel "will serve to correct that absurd rumour about American life" that had spread about the novel.[209] The rumors to which Lewes referred had been summarized in *The Athenaeum* in September 1875: "A Report is going the round of the papers that 'George Eliot has a new novel in preparation, illustrating American life.' The first part of the statement is, we believe, true; the second part is undoubtedly incorrect."[210] After the novel's first number was published in January 1876, the *Boston Daily Globe* dismissed the notion that Eliot ever could have produced a novel of "American life," writing, "There were enough fictions about this story to make a good-sized novel by themselves. One astounding announcement was that it would be a study of American life—doubtless out of George Eliot's inner consciousness, for much she knew about America!" before concluding that "The novel proves to be so far as can be judged from the first book, a story whose scene is much the same as that of 'Middlemarch,' for although it opens in a German gambling saloon, the heroine takes the first train to her English provincial home, and arrives there in chapter third."[211]

If Eliot's late novels are any proof, however, it might not be so far fetched to say that

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[209] George Henry Lewes to John Blackwood, London, 18 Novmber 1875, in *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 6, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 1993), Web, 189.

[210] "Literary Gossip," *The Athenaeum*, 18 September 1875, ProQuest. As referenced in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 1993), Web, Volume 6, n. 344.

[211] "George Eliot's New Novel," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 31, 1876, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 4.

America did, in fact, loom large in Eliot's "inner consciousness" throughout the 1860s and 1870s, despite Eliot's attachments to English provincialism. Taken together, in her final four novels—*Romola* (1862-3), *Felix Holt* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-2), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876)—as well as her dramatic poem *The Spanish Gypsy* (1864-1868), Eliot exhibits a surprisingly strong tendency to situate the novels' local, and often locally English, events in relation to the history of conquest and colonization, slavery and emancipation, in the Americas. Though these five texts explicitly address distinct themes or social problems—Renaissance Italian religion and politics, industrialization, the first Reform Acts, the Jewish question, and the racial exclusion of the Roma in fifteenth-century Spain—they are also each set within and organized around three key decades in the history of colonialism and slavery in the Americas: Christopher Columbus's voyage to America in the 1490s (*Romola*, *The Spanish Gypsy*); the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in the early 1830s (*Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*); and emancipation and the end of the American Civil War in the 1860s (*Daniel Deronda*).

Though this chronology might seem coincidental, even absurd at first, given these novels' ostensible disengagement from the Americas (a point underscored by Victorian reviewers' quick dismissal of the notion that Eliot could have had any real interest in "American life"), Eliot quietly but firmly stresses the significance of this history at key moments. For example, in the opening of *Romola*, she frames the novel's project in terms of transhistorical continuities between the Victorian present and a historical period that centers on Columbus:

> More than three centuries and a half ago, in the mid spring-time of 1492, we are sure that the angel of the dawn, as he travelled with broad slow wing from the Levant to the Pillars of Hercules, and from the summits of the Caucasus across all the snowy Alpine ridges to the dark nakedness of the western isles, saw nearly the same outline of firm land and unstable sea…Even if, instead of following the dim daybreak, our imagination pauses on a certain historical spot and awaits the fuller morning, we may see a world-famous city, which has hardly changed its outline since the days of Columbus, seeming to stand as an almost unviolated symbol, amidst the flux of human things, to remind us that we still resemble the men of the past more than we differ from them, as the great mechanical principles on which those domes and

> towers were raised must make a likeness in human building that will be broader and deeper than all possible change.[212]

Eliot appears to articulate here a kind of transhistorical, and perhaps even anti-historicist historicism, insisting that the past is most useful for the ways in which it refuses, ultimately, our attempts to contrast that past to the present.[213] Yet although Columbus and the American continent play no significant role in the narrative that follows, their prominent place in the novel's opening signals that what at first seems like Eliot's resistance to historical periodization might more accurately be described as something like a telescopic view of historical epochs, in which the Victorian modernity in which the novel's readers are situated could as easily said to have begun in 1492 as in 1832. Lest we assume that the decision to locate her theory of history in "the days of Columbus" was coincidental, Eliot returns to this scene once again in the opening of *The Spanish Gypsy*:

> And so in Córodova through patient nights
> Columbus watches, or he sails in dreams
> Between the setting stars and finds new day;
> Then he wakes again to the old weary days,
> Girds on the cord and frock of pale Saint Francis,
> And like him zealous pleads with foolish men….
> For this man is the pulse of all mankind
> Feeding an embryo future, offspring strange
> Of the fond Present, that with mother-prayers
> And mother-fancies looks for championship
> Of all her loved beliefs and old-world ways
> From that young Time she bears within her womb.[214]

Though Columbus and, by extension, that New World that will emerge from the "embryo future" his dreams of conquest contain, remains firmly at the center of Eliot's vision of history, that vision

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[212] George Eliot, *Romola* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 2. Hereafter cited in text.

[213] For a discussion of *Romola*'s peculiarly anti-historicist historicism, see Nicholas Dames, "The Unremembered Past: Eliot's *Romola* and Amnesiac Histories," *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001) ProQuest ebrary e-book, 206-235.

[214] George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, *The Spanish Gypsy, The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems, Old and New* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1901), Google Books e-book, 6-7. Hereafter cited in text.

has evolved. The resemblance between past and present Eliot describes in *Romola* now comes into focus more precisely as a *family* resemblance inevitably born out by the reproductive union of the "old-world" maternity of the European past and the masculine, adventuring "pulse" of American exploration that Columbus embodies.

If the colonization of the Americas could be understood as the "offspring" of Europe's "mother-prayers" for reproductive futurity, by the 1850s and 1860s, American slavery was an unavoidable part of what made that "offspring strange." A decade earlier, while Eliot worked as an editor for the *Westminster Review*, she wrote to Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor to recommend an essay by W. E. Forster on "American Slavery, and Emancipation by the Free States" published in the magazine in 1853: "I hope you are interested in the Slavery question, and in American generally—that cradle of the future. I used resolutely to turn away from American politics, and declare that the United States was the last region of the world I should care to visit…. But I am converted to a profound interest in the history, the laws, the social and religious phases of North America, and long for some knowledge of them. Is it not cheering to think of the youthfulness of our race upon it? — to think that the higher moral tendencies of human nature are yet only in their germ?"[215] For Eliot, slavery was not distinct from America's status as the "cradle of the future," but rather central to the reproductive futurity she found there, if complicatedly so. America's struggle to settle the "Slavery question" was undoubtedly a moral problem, but one that she finds surprisingly "cheering" because it symbolizes not the hardening of a racist political regime, but rather an American moral infancy whose very failings are a sign of its capacity for future development—a development Eliot finds in yet another space of American conquest, the Western frontier: "I feel this more thoroughly when I think of that great Western Continent, with its infant cities, its huge uncleared forests, and its

[215] George Eliot to Mrs. Peter Alfred Taylor, London, 1 February 1853, in *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 2, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 1993), Web, 85-86.

unamalgamated races."[216] Writing a year before the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act that re-opened the possibility that slavery might spread to the newly-settled Western states, Eliot conflates American Manifest Destiny with an escape from the racial "amalgamation" of the Southern slavery states. This vision of the American West suggests that in the moments just before the violence of the American Civil War, Eliot viewed American slavery as a symbol at once of the future early American colonization had wrought and of an already-obsolete past that stood ready to be replaced by another, newer future in which Anglo-American abolitionism would develop hand in hand with a restored racial purity.

In Forster's original essay, a review of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a piece on *Slavery in the Southern States* by a white Carolinian, and *Uncle Tom's Companions*, an edited anthology of excerpts from American fugitive slave narratives by Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown, among others, Forster is more explicit in framing American slavery as both the legacy or "offspring" of British colonialism, and a lingering peril to the Anglo-American white race:

> He [the American white] *does* fear amalgamation—of that there can be no doubt; his blood turns cold at the danger of its corruption. But this fear is the reason why he should struggle, not against the abolition of slavery, but against slavery itself. Doubtless this proximity of races so distinct in natural characteristics and in acquired culture, is a calamity to the civilized Anglo-American, to whom it is little comfort to be told that, as compensation for the contamination of his blood by that of servile savages, he may have the credit of solving the problem of the capabilities of a hybrid race. But these servile savages are side by side with him—brought there not by themselves but by his, or, if we like it better, *by his and our ancestors*; he cannot rid himself of them, for he lives by and on them; he cannot save himself from contamination by keeping them servile—the only chains which will avail for that, are chains on his own passions, and these the freedom of his bondsmen and bondswoman will best furnish.[217] [Emphasis, mine]

Reworking the entwined language of slavery and affection, Forster frames freedom from slavery as a paradox of interracial desire, attachment and repulsion, arguing that abolition is desirable because it

[216] Ibid.

[217] W. E. Forster, "American Slavery, and Emancipation by the Free States," *Westminster Review*, January 1853, 152, British Periodicals.

will metaphorically transfer slavery's chains from the violated black body to a white lust that has proved otherwise uncontrollable. Forster thus imagines the abolitionist cause to turn upon restoring self-possession and sexual consent to the enslaved, and yet in doing so, Forster gives voice to a particularly racist strand of the nineteenth-century antislavery cause, which advocated for abolition as a means of restoring and protecting Anglo-American whiteness from racial "contamination" or "amalgamation"—a strand that Eliot picks up on and extends in her letter to Taylor.[218] At the same time, he also envisions abolition as the final, corrective conclusion to the originary scene of American reproductive futurity Eliot will go on to stage in the opening to *The Spanish Gypsy*. If the marriage of Old World and New, of European and British maternal "ancestors" and masculinist American adventurers, gave rise to the slavery problem, it also set the stage for a new drama of interracial (rather than intergenerational) desire and reproductive "amalgamation." In this drama, abolition and a reinvigoration of American conquest are needed, finally, to restore and re-differentiate the hybrid "offspring strange" of this long era of New World history.

Thus, while Eliot never did produce a realist fiction of "American life," a familial drama of American colonialism, slavery, and emancipation lurked in the background of both her "inner consciousness" early on in her career, and as the backdrop for the works that she went on to produce in later decades, culminating in *Daniel Deronda*, that novel that, as I will argue, can be read as a novel of American life of sorts. But while this drama appears in these early accounts to unfold as a linear narrative of generational development and, to the modern reader, a story about the well-documented solidifying of racializing and racist attitudes in the later decades of the Victorian era, I will argue in this chapter that what is significant about Eliot's most sustained engagement with

[218] Similarly, Forster writes: "nothing will stay this increase [of the mixed breeds] but giving to the coloured woman the possession of her own person and the safeguard of her natural protectors" (153). For a discussion of the relationship between abolition and anti-amalgamationist sentiment, see: Tavia Nyongó, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), ProQuest ebrary e-book.

slavery and its afterlife in *Deronda* is precisely the way in which the novel contravenes linear histories and narrative temporalities to produce a text that pushes on the borders between text and performance, past and future, in ways that call forward to reworkings of the Victorian past in our present moment. Eliot's late works were composed alongside a culture of racial performances whose continual restagings of the family drama of slavery, marriage, and thwarted reproductive futures brought the slave past to life night after night in the theaters of London and Paris for decades after the abolition of slavery in British and European colonies. In the first half of this chapter, I will examine how this performance history helped shape the overlapping terrain of family, slavery, and the production and reproduction of race in the mid-nineteenth century, in order to trace how Eliot and Lewes drew upon and participated in this performance culture in their writings throughout the 1860s and 1870s. In the second half of this chapter, I will turn to *Daniel Deronda*, to show how Eliot reworks the history of slavery and performance in her depictions of Mirah Lapidoth, the novel's Jewish heroine. In this section, I will read the novel alongside a long genealogy of works spanning the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries that similarly seek to reframe the troubled history of slavery and race in Anglo-American performance and visual culture. In doing so, I aim to show how Eliot's novel fits in among a collection of visual and performed works that utilize layered, juxtaposed, and often contradictory historical, cultural, and visual "frames" to complicate conventional modes of racial spectatorship, racial representation, and interpretations of slavery's history and its relationship to the present. *Daniel Deronda*'s novelistic aesthetic, I argue, is fundamentally defined by the cross-pollination of visual and stage effects and the conventions of Victorian realist fiction, as well as of historical and presentist narrative modes. As I will discuss in the next section, the theater offered a mode of encounter with both discourses of slavery and representations of race on stage with which Eliot and Lewes were quite familiar. But as I will argue throughout this chapter, that theatrical culture often questioned and complicated linear temporal relationships between the slave past, the

Victorian present, and the imagined future for characters and audiences alike, producing an interrogation of historical temporality that Eliot, I argue, would go on to restage in *Daniel Deronda*. Thus in presenting the novel alongside readings of plays, abolitionist lectures, paintings, and illustrations from the past as well as the present, this chapter's methods, and its own combination of historicist and transhistorical commitments, are guided as much by the form of Eliot's novel as by its content.

Eliot, Lewes, and Theatrical Performances of Slavery, Race, and Romance on the Nineteenth-Century Stage

In Book II of *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel is rowing on the Thames when he first encounters Mirah, who is on the brink of drowning herself in the river. Just before he comes upon Mirah's figure, the narrator reports that Daniel,

> was all the while unconsciously continuing the low-toned chant which had haunted his throat all the way up the river—the gondolier's song in the 'Otello' where Rossini had worthily set to music the immortal words of Dante
>
> 'Nessun maggior dolore
> Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
> Nella miseria'
>
> and, as he rested on his oar, the pianissimo fall of the melodic wail 'nella miseria' was distinctly audible on the brink of the water. (187)

Thus, when Daniel finally discovers Mirah, she seems not merely a lost woman, but a performer on stage, "a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to" (187). As Daniel feels himself drawn sympathetically towards Mirah, he reassures himself that "I should not have forgotten the look of misery if she had been ugly and vulgar" (188), but Eliot swiftly dispels this self-delusion, adding, "But there was no denying that the attractiveness of the image made it likelier to last. It was clear to him as an onyx cameo: the brown-black drapery, the white face with small, small features, and dark, long-lashed eyes" (188). If Daniel sympathizes with Mirah, that sympathy is intimately bound up with his attraction to her, but that attraction also alternates indeterminately between desire for the flesh-and-blood woman who stands before him

and appreciation for her as an actor playing a role, sculpture, and cameo, a representation rather than the real thing.

The indeterminacy of Mirah's body—is she acting on her misery or merely acting out the scene caught in Daniel's mind?—in this scene is redoubled by Eliot's invocation of *Otello*, which frames their initial meeting as a scene from perhaps the most iconic cross-racial romance performed on the nineteenth-century stage. Mirah's entrance into the novel of course ushers in the novel's complicated plot of ethnic identification, transformation and cross-ethnic desire, but Eliot's staging of the scene is an ironic one. The words Daniel sings and Mirah embodies come, in Rossini's opera, from a scene that features not Othello but Desdemona, the play's white heroine.[219] Yet by the novel's end, readers will discover that neither Mirah nor even Daniel quite approximates that role, and that the only plot that could properly compare to *Othello*'s cross-racial romance is Gwendolen's thwarted desire for Deronda. This future unfolding of the novel's real plot does not, however, stop Eliot from inviting readers, and Daniel himself, to project the intertextual, interracial plot of *Othello* onto the scene they are watching. Throughout the scene, Eliot paints Mirah as a kind of racial optical illusion, inviting readers to view her alternately as marble white and onyx black, in an attempt to discern where she fits in the schema of racial categorization *Othello* would seem to offer. When Daniel first sees her, for example, Eliot describes Mirah's black hair and black hat, but studiously avoids describing her skin color; she is a "low slim figure, with most delicate little face, her dark curls pushed behind her ears under a large black hat" (187). Paragraphs later, Mirah's "white face" is only revealed after Eliot has yoked its beauty to "an onyx cameo," whose blackness Eliot ultimately attributes not to Mirah's body but rather to her "brown-black" clothing. As in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Eliot here invites readers to read not only the scene's romance, but also its interplay of white

[219] My discussion of Eliot's use of the "Gondolier's Song" draws on Delia Da Sousa Correa's discussion of this scene in "George Eliot and the 'Expressiveness of Opera,'" *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 48, no. 2 (2012): 174-5.

and black imagery along *Othello*'s racial color line, only to refuse and then ironize the relationship between the novel's aesthetic, its characters' ethnic identity, and its readers' attempts at racial categorization just moments later. Of course, the irony extends not only to the novel's readers, but also to Daniel himself, who will spend much of the novel that follows attempting to navigate racial optics, performances of ethnic identity, and the polite racism that nineteenth-century Europe has to offer before his desire for Mirah can develop into a proper marriage plot. By framing Mirah's entrance into the novel with *Othello*, therefore, Eliot suggests that Mirah belongs to a complex culture of racial performance that readers and characters alike will have to navigate on their way towards romantic satisfaction. At the same time, Eliot places Mirah in a doubled position within this culture, alternately appearing as both Desdemona, the imperiled white heroine, and Othello, the former slave and tragic black hero that the novel appears to promise its readers in this same moment.

If this scene represents Mirah's entrance into the novel's plot, it also represents the moment when the nineteenth-century's heterogeneous and wildly popular culture of racial performance, and performances of slavery in particular, infiltrates *Daniel Deronda*'s narrative structure and its aesthetics.[220] In this chapter, I use the term "racial performance" to refer to nineteenth-century plays, lectures, and other staged spectacles that theatricalized racial blackness in various ways, but almost always through forms of cross-racial, or what Michael Ragussis calls "cross-ethnic" performance.[221] While these performances could take myriad forms, undoubtedly the most dominant form of cross-

[220] For a reading of Eliot's novel in relation to the "Beautiful Jewess" and the "Tragic Mulatta" of the Victorian stage, see Kimberly Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 122-127. While I will likewise discuss the overlap between Eliot's staging to Jewishness and African American slavery in the novel, my reading focuses on the specifically cross-racial performance dynamics that underwrite Eliot's portrayal of Jewish and African American performances as linked, and that tie those performances back to the slavery system.

[221] Michael Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

racial performance on the Victorian British stage was the blackface minstrel show. Though the form was devoted to stereotypical depictions of African Americans, is sustained strong connections to nineteenth-century England, beginning with British actor Charles Mathews' influential early blackface performances in the 1820s. In 1836, T. Daddy Rice brought his act "Jump Jim Crow" to England, launching what Michael Pickering describes as a "Jim Crow Craze" that swept England throughout the 1830s and 1840s. By the 1860s, the minstrel show was "firmly established as a staple form of entertainment" in England, one that, as Pickering shows, was distinctive among Victorian theatricals in part because of its remarkably widespread appeal and (counterintuitively, from the vantage point of the present) its reputation as a "respectable" form of entertainment that could appeal to even the most prudish swathes of the Victorian viewing public.[222]

Even as blackface minstrelsy established itself as one of the dominant forms of Victorian theatrical entertainment, however, another form of racial performance, the antislavery melodrama, was gaining popularity on the British stage, no doubt propelled by the numerous stage adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that swept the London stage in what Sarah Meer has described as an "*Uncle Tom* Mania" that followed the novel's publication. While we might expect blackface minstrelsy and the antislavery melodrama to have been at odds with one another in both their portrayals of slavery and the racialization of African Americans, critics such as Saidiya Hartman, Daphne Brooks, Sarah Meer, Robert Nowatzki, Hazel Waters, and others have argued that many of the most popular stagings of slavery and racial blackness in the nineteenth century were comprised of what Meer, writing about performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in London, describes as a "very strange cocktail" of "blackface and sentimentality" that mixed minstrelsy's

[222] The chronology in this paragraph is largely a summary of the account provided in Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 1-10.

comic denigration of blackness with melodrama's putative sympathy for the suffering of slaves.[223] For Hartman, minstrelsy and melodrama share a fundamental investment in defining blackness through acts of theatrical violence, whether the comedic "blows" of the minstrel show or the tragic suffering of the melodramatic heroine, that reinforced "a repressive and restrictive reception of blackness, which, although elastic enough to permit white self-exploration, could not trespass the parameters established to maintain racial hierarchies."[224] In this way, Hartman reads the minstrel show and the melodrama as forms that not only extended the mixture of (black) terror and (white) pleasure that undergirded the slavery system, but also "filiated the coffle, the auction block, the popular stage, and plantation recreations in a scandalous equality" as "sites of performance" where "suffering was transformed into wholesome pleasures."[225]

Crucial to the affiliation between minstrelsy and melodrama Hartman describes was the fact that melodramas such as Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* and adaptations of *Uncle Tom* not only featured, as Sarah Meer argues, characters and comic vignettes clearly borrowed from the minstrel show, as well as actors who performed the role of slave characters in blackface, but also, as Daphne Brooks has argued, built upon minstrelsy's conventions of racial representation as part of the staging and story of their often ambiguously racialized heroes and heroines. Because these characters proclaimed themselves to be black and yet appeared as epidermally white on stage, Brooks argues, they represented a form of "cultural excess" that presented a challenge to prevailing notions of blackness as a stable visual marker—one that the melodrama often had to work to reinscribe by "presenting and exposing excessive bodies in order to finally purge them from the narrative

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[223] Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 158.

[224] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 29.

[225] Ibid., 32.

altogether."[226] In the process, these characters also purged the specter of black-white intimacy and the threat of sexual miscegenation that Eric Lott and Tavia Nyongó argue provided minstrelsy's affective undercurrents of desire and disgust. Thus, as Hartman and Brooks detail, both blackface minstrelsy and melodramas that centered on the tragedies of slavery or racial injustice against black subjects proffered black bodies whose theatrical movements "out of place" (whether from the slave plantation, from a narrowly circumscribed visual and cultural definition of blackness, or from the legal and cultural barriers set up to prohibit black-white intimacies) were ultimately policed and disciplined, returning them to their rightful frames through punishing acts of violence, suffering, or self-sacrifice.

Shakespeare's *Othello* might at first seem to stand outside of this distinctively nineteenth-century performance culture, given its early modern composition and setting. But in fact performances of the play in the period inevitably raised questions about both the status of blackness—real and performed—on the Victorian stage, and about the appeal and limitations of interracial romance for Victorian audiences. As Joyce Green MacDonald has shown, early nineteenth-century stagings of *Othello* were reshaped not only by debates about the abolition of slavery in the colonies, but also by the culture of minstrel performances that arose concomitantly with those debates. Between 1833 and 1834, MacDonald explains, London audiences could see *Othello* performed in a "wildly successful" stage run by Edmund Kean and William Macready, who took turns playing the parts of Othello and Iago; in the landmark London debut performance by African-American actor Ira Aldridge; and as a comedic burlesque titled, "Moor of Venice, formerly an Independent Nigger, from the Republic of Haiti."[227] From its earliest Victorian stagings, then, the

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[226] Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 41.

[227] Joyce Green MacDonald, "Acting Black: 'Othello,' 'Othello' Burlesques, and the Performance of Blackness," *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 2 (May 1994): 231-2.

play demanded that audiences sift through highly variable, explicitly performative representations of blackness, which staged, in MacDonald's account, an ongoing battle alternately to produce and resist an image of blackness as "an imaginative product of white cultures, both theatrical and racial."[228] As a nexus for exchanges between high and low culture, *Othello* reveals the ways in which popular, and explicitly racist, forms of minstrel performance came to be inseparable from more traditional, institutionalized artistic worlds in the nineteenth century.

The permeable boundaries between Victorian high culture and the field of popular racial performances is evident in Lewes's own writings on *Othello* from the later nineteenth century. Eliot and Lewes in fact saw Aldridge perform scenes from *Othello* in 1857, though Eliot reports that the pair found Aldridge "pitiably bad," a judgment Lewes echoed.[229] If, as MacDonald argues, Aldridge's performances unsettled English audiences because the "verisimilitude" of watching a black actor perform in a black role was *too* real, "unsettl[ing] the appropriation and re-presentation of narratives of fixed racial identity produced by the play's heritage of blacked-up white men in the title role," the relationship between blackness, the real, and the acted continued to trouble Lewes years later, even when the part of *Othello* was undertaken, as was tradition on the English stage, by white performers.[230]

In an essay on "Foreign Actors on Our Stage," published in his 1875 collection of essays *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, Lewes discusses at length the German Actor Charles Fechter's widely

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[228] Ibid., 232.

[229] George Eliot to Sara Sophia Hennell, Richmond, 24 February 1857, in *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 2, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), *British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 1993), Web, 301. In *On Actors and the Art of Acting* ((New York: Brentano's, 1911), Hathi Trust Digital Library e-book), George Henry Lewes wrote, "In a little while we may rival even the Germans in endurance. They listened without protest to the negro actor, Aldridge, declaiming "Othello" in English, while all the other characters spoke German. And the Germans, we constantly hear, are 'a nation of critics!'" (207).

[230] MacDonald, "'Acting Black,'" 241.

publicized 1861 performance of *Othello*. In Lewes's account, Fechter's performance fails precisely because the actor has committed to transforming the drama from transcendent tragedy to a realist play, but also, significantly, because this transformation resituates Othello's blackness within a specifically nineteenth-century framework of both racialization and racial performance. Lewes writes that "in his edition of the play, Fechter urges two considerations. First, that Shakespeare is to be acted, not recited; secondly, that *tradition* ought to be set aside."[231] Fechter's aim is "the desire to be natural—the aim at realism," but, Lewes continues, "here the confusion between realism and vulgarism works like poison. It is not consistent with the nature of tragedy to obtrude the details of daily life."[232] The vulgar realism of Fechter's production, Lewes concludes, "is only to be accounted for on the supposition that Fechter wished to make 'Othello' a *drame* such as would suit the Porte St. Martin."[233] If Lewes objects to the way in which Fechter's performance mingled Shakespearean tragedy with performance techniques and stagings more appropriate to the modish French *drame*, he did so, however, not on the grounds of aesthetic value or national literary tradition alone, but also because this mixing of dramatic genres produced an Othello whose blackness was too modern, at once too present and too indeterminate for the Shakespearean stage. For Lewes, the ability to transcend his tragic blackness defines Othello as a character: "Othello is black—the very tragedy lies there; the whole force of the contrast, the whole pathos and extenuation of his doubts to Desdemona, depend on this blackness."[234] In a review of an earlier 1853 production of Othello by German actor Ludwig Dessoir, Lewes explains that "it must be noted that Othello, above all other tragic personages, needs great physical qualities in the performer. He must redeem his black

[231] Lewes, *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, 154.

[232] Ibid., 155.

[233] Ibid., 155.

[234] Ibid., 154.

complexion by dignity and power which outwardly express the greatness of his spirit. There must be something about him which makes us *feel* Desdemona could have loved him."[235] For Lewes, Othello's blackness at once catalyzes Shakespeare's tragedy and signifies the transcendence of both Othello's spirit and the physical capabilities of the white performer who plays him, as both character and actor must work to overcome this catalyst in order to alternately achieve and express the play's intended, heroic pathos. But Fechter, Lewes objects, has failed to embody the dramatic blackness of Shakespeare's Othello precisely because he has transformed the character into a modern racial subject: "Fechter," Lewes writes, "makes him a half-caste, whose mere appearance would excite no repulsion in any woman out of America."[236] Fechter's vulgar realism not only transforms high drama into popular melodrama, but also transforms a timeless blackness into a historically-specific form of blackness, situated in modern history and marked by colonization, slavery, and creolization (as implied by Lewes's reference to the contentious battle over the meaning of interracial identity in nineteenth-century America) that disrupts the play's historical temporality with a pressingly of-the-moment reminder of nineteenth-century race relations. The aesthetics of *Othello* and the racial status of Othello are equally shaped by the play's relationship to nineteenth-century realism (or, rather, a misguided attempt at realism, in Lewes's account), which erroneously forces these two performative planes to intersect: "It is this error into which Fechter falls in Othello; he vulgarises the part in the attempt to make it natural. Instead of the heroic, grave, impassioned Moor, he represents an excitable creole of our own day."[237] Othello's staged blackness, in Lewes's description, is both insistently physical, as Othello's transcendence rests upon both Desdemona and the audience's capacity to simultaneously see and look past that blackness, and must also be disconnected from the

[235] George Henry Lewes, "German Plays: Othello," in John Forster and George Henry Lewes, *Dramatic Essays* (London: Walter Scott, Limited, 1896), 261.

[236] Lewes, *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, 154.

[237] Ibid., 142.

everyday or "real" historical context of the play's production. Yet in his attempts to draw a clear distinction between high and low performances of blackness, between the venerable Moor and the "excitable creole," Lewes's criticism reveals the extent to which both the modern history of racialization and the popular theaters in which this history played out in the nineteenth century seeped across the borders of high and low culture, influencing audiences' perceptions of transhistorical, high cultural works throughout the period, perhaps none more so than *Othello*.

Performances of the nineteenth-century's *Othello* thus provide abundant evidence that when Victorian audiences went to the theater (similarly to when they first confront Mirah in Book II of *Daniel Deronda*) they frequently engaged in a form of shifting, layered racial optics that demanded that they discern characters' race by scrutinizing the potentially conflicting evidence provided by the play text, its performance tradition, visual cues produced by costuming, lighting, and theatrical effects (and especially burnt cork and other forms of stage makeup that white actors used to "blacken up"), and audience members' own knowledge of an actor's race, ethnicity, and/or nationality, which was often explicitly highlighted or excoriated in advertisements and reviews—the latter a practice in which Lewes actively participated. This racial optics was clearly shaped by but in no way confined to the minstrel stage. In fact, Lewes's descriptions of Fechter's *Othello* also link the play directly to another set of nineteenth-century representations of slavery and abolition on stage that Eliot both draws upon and responds to in *Daniel Deronda*: the Porte St. Martin *drame* that Lewes refers to above, and the transatlantic circuit of racial melodramas to which some of those performances belonged.

If productions of *Othello* occupied an important role in the history of minstrelsy's swift travels from popular entertainment to respectable high culture in the nineteenth century, the play also played a surprisingly important role in the history of both the slave melodrama and the broader culture of nineteenth-century melodrama to which those plays belonged. Though stage melodrama

came to be seen as a French import, in his account of the nineteenth-century stage in France, Marvin Carlson shows that its earliest roots can be traced back to England, whose tradition of Gothic drama and expertise in stage spectacle was first brought to France by English companies in the 1820s. Carlson in fact traces the birth of French romantic drama to an early performance of Shakespeare at the Porte Saint Martin in 1822, when J. T. Merle, the director of the Paris theater, brought an English company there to perform *Othello*. The play's run was a disaster, and it would take another five years for French audiences to accept Shakespeare on their stages. Nevertheless, the Porte Saint Martin went on to become first "[t]he major boulevard home of the romantic drama," and later "Paris' leading theatre of spectacle."[238] In the history of nineteenth-century theater, then, *Othello* was perhaps less the opposite of the Porte Saint Martin *drame* than an earlier ancestor. As perhaps the most important home for French romantic and melodramatic drama, the Porte Saint Martin would go on to début popular plays that staged slavery and abolition for nineteenth-century audiences: Anicet-Bourgeois and Dumanoir's *Le Docteur noir* (1846) and M. E. Plouvier's *Le Sang-Mêlé* (c. 1856), the latter of which lists Fechter in the role of the light-skinned "sang-mêlé," or mixed-race fugitive slave and anti-hero Maxime Timor in the dramatis personae of the 1856 Lévy Frère playtext.[239] By invoking the Porte Saint Martin *drame* to castigate Fechter's *Othello*, then, Lewes not only takes on the issue of how *Othello* staged blackness/blackface, then, but also underscores (in attempting to deny) the play's relationship to these popular performances of slavery, abolition, and,

[238] Marvin Carlson, *The French Stage in the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), 104, 168.

[239] Carlson also notes that Lamartine's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1850) opened at the Porte Saint Martin. Interestingly, the Porte Saint Martin theatre was also home to playwright Victor Séjour. The son of mixed-race parents in New Orleans, Louisiana, Séjour's "Le Mulâtre" has been "credited…[as] the earliest known short story by an African-American writer," according to Philip Bader, *African-American Writers* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), Google Books e-book, 212.

in the case of *Le Docteur noir* and *Le Sang-Mêlé*, interracial kinship, romance, and reproduction.[240]

When Eliot opens readers' introduction to Mirah with Rossini's *Otello* (itself a cross-genre, cross-linguistic adaptation of Shakespeare's play), then, she is not merely foreshadowing a forthcoming story of racial romance; rather, she is situating the novel's readers directly within the heterogeneous but closely interlinked world of white and African American, minstrel and melodramatic, popular and high culture performances of slavery and race—a world with which Lewes and Eliot were familiar. Indeed, Eliot would go on to wrestle with this world of racial performance throughout *Daniel Deronda*, where theatricality frequently converges with both memories of slavery and Eliot's attempts to reimagine the future that Atlantic slavery had wrought in different ways. Before returning to Eliot's interventions in this performance history, however, I will return to the nineteenth-century theatrical world to trace the conventions and performative effects of the slavery melodramas that Lewes sought to distance *Othello* from. Though Lewes

[240] These connections are also, of course, internal to Shakespeare's *Othello* (edited by M. R. Ridley (New York: Metheun, 1984)). In the play, Othello reports that he wooed Desdemona by regaling her with, in essence, a fugitive slave narrative:

I spoke of the most disastrous chances /
Of moving accidents by flood and field; /
of hair-breadth scapes i' th'imminent deadly breach; /
Of being taken by the insolent foe /
And sold to slavery, and my redemption thence /
And with it all my travel's history /
…this to hear would Desdemona seriously incline….
and with greedy ear /
Devour up my discourse. (28-9)

Meanwhile, force of Othello's narrative is itself portrayed as enchaining to Desdemona, whose consent to their romance is questioned several times throughout the play: "if she in chains of magic were not bound / Whether a maid, so tender, fair, and happy, / So opposite to marriage, that she shunn'd / The wealthy curled darlings of our nation, / Would ever have (to incur general mock) / Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou?" (19). Most importantly, however, the romance between Othello and Desdemona is defined from the play's opening by its logical end—the reproduction of mixed-race progeny—that the rest of the play must work to actively thwart. Without speculating on what the play might have meant to Shakespeare's contemporaries, it seems safe to assume that nineteenth-century audiences would have found in *Othello* a familiar plot of slavery, interracial romance, and thwarted futurity echoed by the nineteenth-century plays I discuss in this section.

castigates the world of racial melodrama, these cross-racial romances placed slavery in relation to questions about the reproduction of the family, marriage, and economies of heterosexual exchange, establishing a world in which concerns about amalgamation and feminism could come to seem surprisingly intertwined, and setting the stage for Eliot's examination of these themes in her later works.

Nineteenth-Century Slave Melodrama, Cross-Racial Romance, and the Drama of Possession

Though little read today, the Porte Saint Martin slave melodramas and their fellow transatlantic depictions of slavery on stage offered a kind of ritual re-enactment of the intertwined story of slavery and marriage that is significant for the way it capitalized on the iterative nature of popular performance itself to continually reanimate, and ultimately rework, that story for nineteenth-century audiences. Moving between and across France, England, and America, plays such as *Le Docteur noir* and *Le Sang-Mêlé*, each of which were translated, adapted for, and performed on the London stage, transatlantic adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859), and even less well-known melodramas such as Shirley Brooks's *The Creole, or Love's Fetters* (1847) and African-American abolitionist William Wells Brown's play *The Great Escape* (which was never fully produced on stage, but rather read aloud by Wells Brown on his lecture tours, beginning in 1847, and published in 1858[241]), though disparate in nationality, setting, tone, popularity, and their commitment to antislavery and antiracist critique, all performed scenes that portrayed slavery's bondages and love's bonds as part of a shared plot of possession and exchange. In each of these dramas, slavery presents an obstacle to marriage because one or both of the play's romantic protagonists is, was, or will become in the course of the play, a slave. Ostensibly, then, these plays, in typical melodramatic fashion, convert the political and legal

[241] This timeline comes from Leo Hamalian and James V. Hatch, editors, William Wells Brown, "The Great Escape: or, A Leap for Freedom," *The Roots of African American Drama: An Anthology of Early Plays, 1858-1938* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991), 39.

problem of slavery into a question of romantic desire and sacrifice, whose solutions are rooted in private love and public emotional catharsis rather than antislavery legislation.

From another angle, however, these plays also belatedly brought to life juridical and political intersections of marriage and slavery buried in legal arguments of earlier decades, albeit with important distinctions. In all of these plays, slavery and romance are placed proximate to one another not only to, as Hazel Waters argues, "domesticate" the slavery problem, but also to interrogate the legal, social, and anthropological ground that slavery and marriage were imagined to share.[242] In particular, Brooks's *The Creole* and Boucicault's *The Octoroon* craft plots in which slavery and marriage overlap with and compete against one another, in essence playing out on stage the drama of slavery as a kind of holograph for the drama of heterosexual exchange. Unlike the traditional marriage plot, however, the marriages many of these plays offered to audiences (with the exception of Wells Brown and *Uncle Tom*) end not in the successful performance of the marriage vows or domestic felicity, but rather in a wide range of tactics—from spectacular death scenes to political revolution to offstage ironies—that thwart their marital and reproductive futures. Even as these performances helped to reanimate, embody, and enact the union of slavery and marriage found in earlier nineteenth-century law, in other words, they did so only to dismantle the interracial, "amalgamated" racial future that union was likely to have produced. These performances thus achieved two contradictory effects simultaneously: they reiterated, and so reinvigorated, the legal and political intersections between slavery, kinship, and marriage in order to remember and critique the slave past, but they did so to celebrate a future of restored whiteness absent ex-slaves and their kin. In many of these dramas, in other words, abolition could come only at the cost of freed slaves'

[242] See: Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 168-173.

futures.[243]

Brooks's *The Creole* and Boucicault's *The Octoroon* each present audiences with melodramatic stories about slavery's injustices that center on mixed-race, white female protagonists whose slavery stands in the way of their marriage to the play's white, planter heroes. Brooks's *The Creole*, first staged at the Lyceum in April 1847, takes place in Mauritius over the course of a single day, February 4th, 1794, the day that news of the revolutionary National Convention's decision to abolish slavery in the French colonies reaches the island. Alphonse de Nyon, the scion of a wealthy white planter, has just returned as a member of the Revolutionary Army to inherit his father's slavery estate. Upon his arrival, he immediately spots Louise Fauriel and falls head over heels, only to discover a few scenes later that Louise is a slave on his father's plantation. Because of his revolutionary tendencies, de Nyon's father had barred de Nyon in his will from freeing any of the slaves he has inherited. Thus, de Nyon discovers that the woman he most wants for his wife is instead part of the slave property he neither wished for nor can will away. Hoping to free Louise so that he can marry her, de Nyon is tricked into selling her for pennies to Latour, a villainous "creole" who intends to keep Louise as a slave for himself. The play's eccentric cast of characters—a Jewish banker, a female French officer—attempt to intervene, but ultimately Louise only wins her freedom when news of French colonial abolition reaches the play in its climactic finale. The play bears a striking resemblance to the plot of Boucicault's much more well-known *The Octoroon*, which opened in New York in 1859, and was staged in London in 1861 at the Adelphi Theatre.[244] In the later play, George Peyton returns from Europe to his native Louisiana, where he has inherited Terrebonne, a slave estate from his uncle, Judge Peyton, who has left the estate heavily mortgaged in his death. George quickly falls in

[243] This chapter is far from the first to argue that melodramas sought to restore a racial whiteness imperiled by slavery and the cross-racial romance. See, for example, Brooks's reading of race melodrama in *Bodies in Dissent*.

[244] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 43.

love with Zoe, the judge's beloved "natural child." Though Zoe was the daughter of Judge Peyton's "quadroon" slave, he granted her freedom as a child, and she has been a fixture at Terrebonne ever since. But while George and Zoe confess their love for one another, McClosky, a treacherous "Yankee" and plantation overseer, uncovers a paper trail suggesting that Zoe's freedom papers are void because Terrebonne, and the slave property held there, were mortgaged at the time that those papers were signed; because the Judge was not wholly and properly Zoe's owner, he could not legally grant her freedom. Zoe is reclaimed as a slave, and put up for auction with the rest of Terrebonne's slaves to pay off the Judge's outstanding debts, where she is purchased by McClosky while a penniless George looks on. In the play's original ending, Zoe commits suicide, and is carried back onstage, lifeless, in George's arms moments before McClosky blows up a steamer ship filled with bails of cotton in the play's spectacular finale. When the play was performed in London, audiences protested Zoe's death so vehemently that Boucicault revised the play's ending to allow George and Zoe to escape together.[245]

In both plays, the theatrical apparatus of the Victorian marriage—the spoken vow, the marriage contract, and the wedding proscenium—are conspicuously replaced by the props and stagings of the slave plantation. When, in Act II of *The Octoroon*, George and Zoe declare their love for one another, their dialogue ends not with an engagement to marry, but instead with a refusal of marriage amid declarations about slavery's family history and foreshadowings of its interracial future. Invoking Judge Peyton's wife, Mrs. Peyton, Zoe argues, "And our mother, she, who from infancy treated me with such fondness, she who, as you said, had most reason to spurn me, can she forget what I am? Will she gladly see you wedded to the child of her husband's slave? No! she would revolt from it as all but you would, and if I consented to hear the cries of my heart, if I did not crush out my infant love, what would she say to the poor girl on whom she had bestowed so much? No,

[245] For a discussion of the revised London ending, see Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 43-4.

no!"[246] In the play's programme, the editors have noted that the first Act opens on "The strange relation and affection existing between Madame Peyton and her husband's natural daughter" (2-3). That "strange…affection" bears itself out in Zoe's refusal to marry, in which she simultaneously claims to cherish Mrs. Peyton's familial "fondness" and assert that fondness as the looming obstacle to her marrying into, and becoming a legitimate part of, the Peyton family. The unchosen, inherited claims of slavery's "strange" familiarity render Zoe and George not only lovers, but also cousins whose incestuous familial bonds block the path towards the chosen bliss of consensual marriage. The paradoxes of George and Zoe's love thus illustrate the uneven course of the family's progress from bondage to contract, from consanguine alliance towards consensual affiliation. In *The Octoroon*, the outmoded logic of the slavery system, which depends on the measures of blood percentage to which the play's title refers, values genealogical descent over the "strange" but elective love of chosen families; slavery thus comes to represent not so much a crime against the enslaved subject so much as a threat to modern romance. As the internal contradictions of Zoe's speech unwittingly reveal, however, that supposedly powerful love has its limits, and Zoe comes up against them as soon as she invokes that love: Mrs. Peyton may love her like family, but that love ends where her entrance into the family proper begins.

Boucicault's play in fact turns upon dramatic structures and scenes that would appear to edge towards a critique of slavery insofar as slavery belongs to and represents a world governed by blood and the specter of alliance and patriarchal exchange, yet the play's melodramatic framing demands that Zoe's heroism and her pathos be communicated in that world's language of indebtedness, inheritance, and blood ties. When McClosky insists that, legally, Zoe must relinquish her freedom, he does so by leading the play's audience through a complex story about offstage debts few of the play's characters can even remember. Twenty years before the action of the play, Judge

[246] Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, [1866?]), ProQuest American Drama Full-Text Database, Literature Online, 35. Hereafter cited in text.

Peyton had lost a huge portion of his estate in a judgment against him for outstanding financial debts, which came about in part because a Liverpool firm had lost one of his investments when they went bankrupt (an event that, by the play's timeline, would have occurred in the 1830s, and so we can assume to be implicitly tied to the financial upheavals that attended British abolition). The Liverpool firm has since been reconstituted, and stands ready to repay their debt to the Peytons, but McClosky manages to destroy the evidence. On stage, McClosky pores through Peyton's writing desk, flourishing bills, wills, and court judgments, dramatizing the winding trail of legal and financial debts and political decisions that precede Zoe and George, and that they inherit along with their intertwined blood lines at the play's opening. Family history, in other words, consists of the linked burdens of blood, finance, inept patriarchal benevolence, and old world British politics, all of which conspire against Zoe and George's modern love. Boucicault dramatizes the results when Zoe steps onto the auction block in the play's famous climax. On one side, the devious McClosky bids to recapture Zoe as his slave and concubine. On the other, Sunnyside, one of the Peyton's neighbors, bids to purchase Zoe on behalf of his wealthy daughter, Dora, who sees Zoe as a rival for George's affections. George has resisted Dora's offer to marry him and save Terrebonne from its debts, refusing to enter into a scene of marital exchange with the Sunnysides. But the result only redoubles the strength of heterosexual exchange within the universe of Terrebonne, where the object of the play's romance—Zoe—becomes a literal object of property exchange, as Boucicault invites audiences to witness her transformation from romantic heroine to slave property on the auction block. The play thus facilitates a narrative transaction in which the white heroine, Dora, loses her role as romantic object in a background plot of heterosexual exchange—a role she willingly courted—so that Zoe can become the object of a property exchange that is underwritten by an economy of sexual desire (McClosky's for Zoe and Dora's for George). In doing so, Boucicault appears to portray white heterosexual exchange and black slavery not as identical phenomena, but

rather as social relations that are so structurally similar that they can take the place of one another within the play's overarching dramatic structure. More importantly, the pathos of Zoe's auction scene would seem to invite audiences to reflect critically not only on slavery's injustices, but also on the uncanny resemblance between slavery and marriage insofar as the play's marriage plot ends up devolving into a series of crossed financial and sexual exchanges that culminate in a slave auction.

Racial inheritance of course proves to function as the impenetrable barrier separating Dora's attempts at marriage from Zoe's fall into slavery; only in Zoe could sexual competition and property exchange come together so literally as a scene of the possession and transaction of a slave because only Zoe's blood possesses the "one drop in eight" that could turn person into property. But where the play can at times seem ambivalent about the justice of Louisiana's race laws, it ultimately cannot resist returning to their system of family genealogy to articulate Zoe's heroism, cultivating audiences' sympathies for her by turning her into an openly willing slave. When the auctioneer, aided by McClosky, reveals that Zoe's free papers are void, Zoe explains that she will embrace her slavery willingly: "My father gives me freedom—at least he thought so—may heaven bless him for the thought, bless him for the happiness he spread around my life. You say the proceeds of the sale will not cover his debts—let me be sold then, that I may free his name—I give him back the liberty he bestowed upon me, for I can never repay him the love he bore his poor Octoroon child, on whose breast his last sigh was drawn, into whose eyes he looked with the last gaze of affection" (50). While Zoe in no way wants her slavery, she nonetheless *wills* it. In doing so, Zoe ostensibly puts into practice the "freedom" that her white, liberal father cultivated in her. But both the motivation and fruits of that act of freedom are thoroughly bound up in the melodrama of familial obligation; Zoe was never really free, but indebted to the Peytons for their love and affection. And under the logic of a slavery system that can convert property into free person and back, that emotional debt is best repaid through an economic transaction that enriches Terrebonne, shifting the burden for the

Peyton's financial debts onto her shoulders alongside her indebtedness for the slaveholder's love (financial debts which derived in part from the debts Britain accrued in the 1830s from their own emancipation acts, if not from Judge Peyton's more local decision to emancipate Zoe rather than hold her as slave property). If Boucicault's play appears at first to reanimate skeletal structures of heterosexual exchange in a story about slavery in order to critique the burdens of blood and of slavery in equal measure, the play can nevertheless only imagine an ending in which the responsibilities for willing slavery are transferred back to the play's African-American heroine, where that self-willed slavery and, later, self-sacrifice, can be celebrated as the solution to the "strange" family affections born out by slavery's history. Zoe becomes the play's heroine not when she escapes the burdens of blood, family debts, and slavery's history, but when she finally wills herself to accept them.

In *The Creole*, Brooks likewise draws together an A-plot about a female slave with a B-plot about minor characters' foiled attempts at facilitating an openly transactional marriage, similarly portraying slavery as a system that at once takes heterosexual exchange to extremes, and stands in the way of more modern marriage plots. In contrast to Boucicault, however, Brooks openly ironizes the relationship between slavery and marriage, portraying them as social relations locked together, within the play, in a paradoxical battle between competing forms of possession. At the beginning of Act II, after de Nyon has first discovered that Louise was his father's slave, he laments,

> A slave! My slave! I have here (*takes up papers*) the accursed proof which separates us forever, while declaring her irrevocably mine. The slave whose beauty, whose grace, whose intellect—charms that might intoxicate the very soul of the prostrate lover, exulting in the thought that they were for him alone—the slave, whom the law pronounces incapable of uttering the marriage vow, the slave is mine! And such is the end of my day dream.[247]

De Nyon's monologue lays bare the uncanny relation between the language of marriage and the

[247] Shirley Brooks, *The Creole; or, Love's Fetters* (London: F. Ledger, N. D), Victorian Plays Project PDF, 23. Hereafter cited in text.

language of slavery, each of which promises to make Louise's "charms" the property of "him alone," yet stand in the way of one another, as Louise's legal slavery prohibits her from contracting herself in marriage to de Nyon. We are meant to register two ironies here—first, that de Nyon's financial possession of Louise as a slave prohibits his romantic possession of her as his wife, followed by the secondary irony that de Nyon fervently wishes to restore Louise's legal personhood only in order to re-dissolve that personhood into the marriage contract and the possessive demands of the ardent lover, suggesting that the play's marriage plot might pose a less appealing solution to Louise Fauriel's problems than Brooks at first leads us to believe. These layered ironies echo through the action that follow, as the play's male characters scramble to try to marry female characters off to one another to sort out the triangle of love and slavery that forms between de Nyon, Louise, and Latour when de Nyon tries to secure Louise's freedom. In the play's opening, Damiron, a neighboring planter, divulges his hopes to marry his daughter Virginie off to de Nyon in order to release himself from unpaid debts he still carries to de Nyon's estate. Meanwhile, Latour hopes to marry Virginie in order to avenge himself on Damiron for the latter's professed hatred of creoles. Once he gains possession of Louise, Latour convinces de Nyon to help him win Virginie's hand in marriage, and de Nyon agrees in the hopes of winning Louise back. In practice, these convoluted plot details mean that for the majority of the play, audiences watch as a series of marital transactions, motivated by a confusing mixture of debt, desire, and personal revenge, are negotiated, extorted, and then (in order to keep the engine of the plot moving forward) foiled. De Nyon's central lament that slavery forestalls the marriage contract reverberates across these transactions, which suggest that under a slavery system, all forms of social relations risk becoming mere modes of property exchange, motivated not by capitalist acquisitiveness but instead by the more primal impulses created by longstanding family debts and tribal resentments.

Where *The Octoroon* mines the disjunctions between Zoe's self-possessed will, George's

possession of her heart, and McClosky's possession of her enslaved body for pathos, Brooks's play tends to oscillate between sincere drama and comedic farce in order to underscore not only the ironies but also the paradoxes of the slavery romance. When de Nyon first confides his problems to Latour, for example, Latour turns the relationship between slavery and marriage into a laugh line: "You are her master.—her sole irresponsible owner. Why not enfranchise her? An oath, and a stroke of the pen will do it. Louise is free, and then if you can induce her to assume another chain—" (26). Nineteenth-century audiences seemingly could not get enough of suggestions that courtship borrowed on slavery's chains; Scribe's 1841 social comedy *Une Chaîne* (which Lewes reviewed favorably in *Dramatic Essays*) revolves almost entirely around variations on this one arch metaphor.[248] But in Brooks's play, the farce works less to make light of slavery than to help distance readers from the play's actions by ironizing its own melodramatic resolutions. At the play's conclusion, the governor of Mauritius reads aloud the National Convention's decree ending slavery, to which de Nyon exclaims, closing the play's action, "Mine—mine for ever—Louise!" (48). The juxtaposition of the abolitionist decree and the French Revolutionary celebrating his reclamation of his former slave property as his romantic possession cannot help but cast an ironic shadow over de Nyon's romantic satisfaction. More importantly, the play's more explicit ironies gesture towards another, unspoken irony: that slavery was, in practice, not a barrier to but rather an incitement for the sexual exploitation of slaves by slaveholders. Latour represents the sexual violence of plantation culture,

[248] In a reversal of the plays I discuss here, Scribe sets *Une Chaîne* in France, but the Antilles feature prominently in the background, as characters return from and make plans to go to the colonies. For example, in a subplot that recalls Rochester's first marriage in *Jane Eyre*, Saint-Geran, one of the play's characters, complains of a wife whom he married for wealth and then left in the colonies. When his wife returns to appear on stage, she of course protests her own marital slavery: "je lui aurias demandé si l'esclave qu'il avait si long-temps oprimée et méprisée n'avait le droit de briser sa chaîne…" However, in Scribe's comedy, the eponymous "chain" refers primarily not to the ties that bind husband and wife but rather to those that bind an unmarried young man to the older woman who has seduced him and helped him make his name as a composer, which he hopes to break away from when he decides he wants to marry his cousin, Aline. See: M. E. Scribe, *Une Chaîne*, Untitled Collection (Paris, N. D.).

threatening to sell Louise to a cousin of "violent…habits," but that culture also underwrites de Nyon's attraction to Louise, and their preexisting attachments in the play's opening. De Nyon stresses Louise's whiteness from the first moment he sees her, describing his first vision of her, dressed in white, as a "white object" (15). This whiteness suggests that Louise was the daughter of a planter as well as a slave. In case audiences missed this point, the Lyceum Playbill provided an excerpt from a history of the Isle of France to prompt the connection: "The condition of the Slave was that of the lowest and most abject degradation. Numbers of these unfortunates had European blood in their veins, being the offspring of *liaisons* between Planters and their Slaves, but such a pedigree only increased their misfortune" (1). By describing these relations as "*liaisons*," the playbill reframes sexual violence as romance. Brooks's play, however, seems more ambivalent. By underscoring Louise's legal incapacity to consent to the marriage contract, by ironizing de Nyon's claims to romantic possession, and by constructing the play's social comedy around the unspoken and perhaps unspeakable fact that de Nyon already held legal claim over Louise's sexuality in his role as slavemaster, Brooks's play renders the "romance" between de Nyon and Louise more ironic than pathetic. Moreover, by implying that Louise's father was also her slave master, Brooks suggests that the "romance" between de Nyon and Louise is not just ironic but incestuous, when we recall that it was de Nyon's father who willed Louise to his son, suggesting that the two might be half-siblings as well as slave and master. If Brooks's play makes slavery play out like a farce of heterosexual exchange, in the course of its unfolding it provides fodder for a critique of the "romance" of slavery's *liaisons* and slaveholder's legal marriages in equal measure as shared dramas of possession and exchange. At the same time, the play's ironies work to differentiate the fantasy of a love shared by slave and slave master from traditional marriage plots by providing opportunities for audiences to reflect on the ways in which slavery's particular form of violent possession makes romance itself indistinguishable from coercion and perversion, as the incestuous ties that underlie de Nyon and

Louise's relationship overshadow the play's ending as much as de Nyon's ironic claims of romantic repossession do. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the play's resolution comes not from love but from politics, via the legal abolition decree read out by Mauritius's governor.

Thus, while Louise and de Nyon conclude the play prepared for romantic union, Brooks has so thoroughly ironized that union and the history of familial entanglements that underwrites it that it is difficult to take seriously the future of that union at the play's end. The broader abolitionism of the play's ending is in fact undercut by a series of historical ironies: while one of the play's actresses concludes the play by asking British audiences to remember with pride their own acts of emancipation, the Isle of France, where the play takes place, was in fact captured by the British in 1810 during the Napoleonic Wars, where the British went on to reinstate slavery in the colony. While the play offers Louise and de Nyon an immediate romantic future, then, that, future is troubled by the specter of slavery's reconstitution (at the hands of the British) that lies ahead at the play's closing. As with so many of the ironies of Brooks's drama, this irony both heightens and critically frames the tropes of the slavery melodrama, by inviting audiences to recognize that even the "successful" union of slave and slaveholder faced a future imperiled by the same ties that bind these characters to slavery's past, and to one another as "strange" kin as well as lovers. Like *The Octoroon*, which concludes with Zoe's spectacular death rather than allow her to face a future of interracial marriage and children with George Peyton, *The Creole* offers audiences a glimpse of this future only to thwart it. By drawing on a series of farcical and historical ironies rather than the spectacle scene to thwart that future, Brooks produces an ending that allows audiences to reflect more critically on the slavery's recent past. But both plays share a fundamental skepticism about a world where slavery's past entanglements of master and slave could bring about a different future, where intimacy between black and white characters could share an equal stage with the normative Western marriage plot. If, as Mary Jean Corbett has argued, the nineteenth-century idealized the

"white endogamy" of cousin marriage, these performances flipped that framework on its head by showing how slavery had created an interracial past that could only produce white racial purity by breaking the entwined bonds of family love and sexual desire that allow incest and romance to blur in these texts.[249] Their goal was to scrutinize the slave "family's" interracial past in order to establish a new, separatist racial future simultaneously freed of both slavery's crimes and the blackness of those against whom slavery had sinned. Consequently, these plays could simultaneously acknowledge and even critique slavery's injustices while at the same time extolling a thoroughly racist dream of future white purity—one which depends upon foiling the chance for the plays' protagonists to reproduce their interracial kinship in future generations.

These plays' emphasis on heterosexual marriage and slavery as uncannily linked phenomena whose bonds abolition alone can help break helps define slave melodramas as a genre, even when this link was not as central to their plot. *The Black Doctor*, J. V. Bridgeman's English translation and adaptation of Anicet-Bourgeois and Dumanoir's play (which premiered at the Royal Victorian Theatre in 1846), centers around a romance between Fabian, an ex-slave and talented doctor, and Pauline, his former slave master's daughter. Though the play spends little time on the dramas of heterosexual exchange found in *The Creole* and *The Octoroon*, the play nonetheless features a scene in which its minor characters underscore the uncanny resemblance between marital and slavery speculations, in a dialogue in which their distinct languages are grafted onto one another in a performance of simultaneity when they learn that Pauline might sell her father's slavery plantation:

> St. Luce (same by-play): She loves me—
> Barban (same by-play): I shall buy—
> St. Luce: She, so lovely, so beautiful!
> Barban: One thousand two hundred and ninety-seven full-grown negroes, without counting fractions.
> St. Luce: It must be a dream.

[249] Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008).

Barban: It is a magnificent speculation.[250]

At the same time, the interlocking language of heterosexual exchange and racial slavery found in these slavery melodramas pervaded other cross-racial romances—including plays that Lewes and Eliot discuss in their letters, such as the operatic drama *The Jewess/La Juive* (first performed in London in 1835), which centers on a romance between a woman who was raised as a Jew and a Christian prince, and Arthur Helps's *Oulita the Serf* (published in 1858), a very minor drama about a Russian Count who falls in love with a serf.[251] Planché's *The Jewess* (adapted from Scribe's *La Juive*, which Eliot saw in London in 1852) in particular exemplifies the way the slavery melodrama's conventions migrated to other ethnic performances in this period.[252] Set in 1380s Geneva, the plot centers on Rachel, a Jewish woman, courted by the married, Christian Prince Leopold, who has disguised himself as the Jew. As we learn in the drama, the context for this cross-religious romance bears a close resemblance to the legal regimes that come under critique in *The Creole*, since in the world of the opera, a marriage "contract" between Christian and Jews is punishable by death: "The torch of marriage lights the crackling pile" of immolation that awaits unruly Jews. Throughout the drama, its characters buy and exchange "an antique chain / Encrusted thick with gems" that belongs to Rachel's father Eleazer before he sells it to Leopold's wife Eudocia, who ultimately places it around Leopold's neck.[253] These scenes of gifting and trade join the strands of the plot around symbolic scenes of enchaining and exchanging antique gems that form a kind of visual metaphor for

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[250] J. V. Bridgeman, *The Black Doctor*, Adapted by Thomas Hailes Lacy (London: Wellington Street, Strand, N. D.), Victorian Plays Project PDF, 23.

[251] Lewes sent his praises on the published text of *Oulita* to its author in 1858 (George Henry Lewes to Arthur Helps, Richmond, 17 February 1858, in *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 8, 195-6)).

[252] Eliot mentions in a letter to the Brays that she saw *La Juive* performed in May 1852 (George Eliot to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, London, 24 May 1852, in *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 2, 28).

[253] J. R. Planché, *The Jewess: A Grand Operatic Drama in Three Acts, Founded on M. Scribe's Opera "La Juive,"* adapted by T. Cooke (London: Porter and Wright, 1835), English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century, microfiche, 14. Hereafter cited in text.

the overlapping language of slavery and marriage found in slavery melodramas. Early in the play, a minor character compares Rachel herself to a gem, explaining that she "Hath eyes which would make dim the brightest diamond / That lies lock'd up in't" (10). While Rachel never enters explicitly into the kinds of financial exchanges that Zoe and Louise do, her affiliation with her father's gems forms a kind of shadow visual language of possession, enchaining, and exchange that yokes her romance to these weighted transactions. Later in the drama, these connections bubble to the surface when Rachel first willingly offers herself as a "slave" to Eudocia in order to see Leopold ("I would be thy servant…Aye, thy slave. The humblest slave / That bends before thee" (25)), and then discovers that she is not in fact a "Jewess" at all but was stolen from her Christian family by Eleazer. Unlike slavery melodramas, *The Jewess* does not explicitly describe marriage as a form of slavery. Instead, the opera uses stage props, visual symbols, and the language of slavery to link its story of cross-ethnic romance to a similar economy of possession and exchange that would re-appear with renewed force in later slavery melodramas.

In these dramas, exchange and cycles of possession, dispossession, and repossession form both a theme of the cross-ethnic and cross-racial romance and the central, repeated action on stage that gives these stories their dramatic structure. Scenes of exchange not only bring slavery and marriage to life as uncanny repetitions of one another; those repeated exchanges are also what link the play's major and minor characters together in symmetrical narrative or dramatic structures, in the same way that, say, the continually shifting suspicion of guilt and collaboration links together characters in detective fiction. The economies of possession and acts of exchange that nineteenth-century anthropologists would go on to describe as features of the pre- or nascent capitalist social order becomes, in these plays, a dramatic form, useful for establishing correspondences between traditional structures of romance such as the marriage plot and the slavery system (and the intricacies of its racial legal and social hierarchies) that the plays intend, by and large, to set themselves against.

At the same time, we might think of these repeated scenes of exchange as functioning, both within the dramas themselves, and across the longer history of dramatic performances that span the nineteenth century, as akin to what Richard Schechner calls "restored behavior." In *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Schechner defines restored behavior as decontextualized "strips" of "living behavior…[that] can be rearranged or reconstructed," and that provide "material" for fresh performances that reimagine the past in their present and future rehearsals.[254] By remixing recognizable but now recontextualized past behaviors, gesture, and performances in new theatrical or cultural situations, Schechner argues that, "[r]estored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become."[255] In the same way, we might think of the scene of human exchange (or, to be more precise, the exchange of the human) as a "restored behavior" that finds itself reanimated every time a father offers to exchange his white daughter for the forgiveness of his debts or the courts repossess the beloved black daughter as a slave. Rather than restore behavior from an unacknowledged or submerged cultural past, however, these dramas act out the very process through which one scene of exchange "restores" the other: when Zoe stands on the auction block, she also "restores" the scene of failed heterosexual exchange Dora Sunnyside attempted to orchestrate, just as when Alphonse de Nyon attempts to orchestrate the mercenary marriage of Virginie Damiron to Latour he "restores" the recent scene of his own disastrous sale of Louise Fauriel to the same villain. By making vivid the ways in which scenes carry over rituals of marriage and slavery into one another, these plays develop their own theatrical anthropology of desire, possession, and exchange, inviting readers to recognize in marriage and in slavery the re-enactment of rituals of human traffic that ostensibly run counter to liberal modernity.

[254] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.

[255] Ibid., 38.

As in Schechner's model, these performances at times allow for "revision" alongside repetition—in *The Creole*, Brooks imagines that politics might intervene where love cannot to set the slave free, for example. But these performances also diverge from Schechner's description of "restored behavior" by failing to fully disengage these "ritually restored" behaviors from their earlier context, or what Schechner calls "the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence," and refusing to establish what Schechner portrays as a coherently linear, if entirely fictive, differentiation between past and present.[256] Because slavery and marriage continually re-animate and re-perform, even if often only partially, scenes of exchange that seem to belong to one another, these plays instead seem to lock marriage and slavery in a circular process of repetition and restoration that firmly ties these social rituals to one another within a long history of patriarchalism, colonialism, and unjust laws—a process that can only be broken through dramatics that offer to kill off that past entirely by, in the words of Daphne Brooks, "ritualistically and erotically circumscrib[ing] and sacrific[ing] racially liminal bodies for the purposes of fortifying the myth of communal homogeneity" and liberal progress.[257]

If restored behavior and the repetitions that elevate that behavior to the realm of performance, in Schechner's account, work only to remake the past as it will be remembered in the future, freed from the burdens of historical causality or continuity, in Joseph Roach's account, the historicity of those repetitions change in relation to the slavery system.[258] In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach draws on Schechner's work to describe what he calls "surrogation," a process through which restored behaviors body forth the slave past into the present and future that do not break from

[256] Ibid., 36.

[257] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 48-9.

[258] Schechner defines performance *as* repetition: "Performances means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the nth time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behavior'" (36). In this scene, performance is something like behavior *on its way towards becoming* (but not yet) ritual, in Schechner's account.

historical memory but instead strengthen it. For Roach, in contrast to Schechner, restored behavior is as much a mode of cultural memory as it is a revision or remaking of the past, one that carries forward not only history's indelible scenes—which include, notably, the slave auction—but also its gross injustices. When Roach watches contemporary spectacles such as the Mardi Gras parade or the NFL draft and sees the re-performance of the slave auction, he also understands the continued exploitation of black bodies and their labor that he finds there as part and parcel of the auction's political, legal, and economic ramifications that, like its ritual stagings, will not simply go away on their own.[259] When it comes to slavery's re-performance in and as marriage on the nineteenth-century stage, it ought to come as little surprise that these re-performances remain firmly mired in their systemic contexts, because these performances capture events that were still undeniably unfolding in their Victorian present. What is more interesting to note is the way in which these performances capture a moment of direct theatrical contact between the law, anthropology, and dramatic forms of marriage and of slavery that continue in much more attenuated, metaphorical and perhaps more easily overlooked forms in the novel. One way to understand these performances, in other words, is as a kind of corollary to what Eve Sedgwick describes as the "periperformative vicinities" of slavery and marriage in nineteenth-century literary texts. For Sedgwick, invocations of slavery amid speech acts directed towards marriage's enactment, or vice versa, destabilize and decenter those speech acts, shifting their "magnetic center" towards performative speech that derives from contexts elsewhere.[260] On the nineteenth-century stage, where performative speech was brought to (virtual) life by theatrical performance, performatives belonging to slavery and to marriage could do something new: they could be staged simultaneously, and, by happening at once, uncannily merge into one another. At these moments, the plays edge up against imagining, however

[259] Roach, *Cities of the Dead.*

[260] Sedgwick, "Around the Performative," 78-9.

fleetingly, that selling a slave could in fact help a man on his progress towards marrying her as his wife, or that contracting marriage with the heiress to a slave plantation could help grant a slave her freedom. In each case, these performances are unsuccessful—de Nyon's sale of Louise leads to dispossession, not marriage; George refuses Dora Sunnyside's marital overtures. But those failures indicate that just as much work had to be done on stage to disarticulate slavery from marriage in the Victorian imagination as to link the two together as imbricated social and dramatic forms. Given the fact that the marriage plot sometimes functioned as a quasi-performance of slavery in itself in these dramas, it is not surprising that the melodramatic symbolism of slavery (fetters, chains, circulating precious gems of the kind found in *The Jewess*) often appear in marriage plots that would appear to have little to do with the slavery of the Americas.

"She will go with you as a willing slave": Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy*

George Eliot's dramatic poem *The Spanish Gypsy* offers one such example, as a text whose story of race and the drama of possession looks to the slavery melodrama for dramatic structure, discourse, and visual metaphor. In recent years, critics interested in Eliot's conception of race and ethnicity in *Daniel Deronda* have turned to *The Spanish Gypsy* as a kind of companion piece to Eliot's last novel. For both Daniel Hack and David Kurnick, Eliot's dramatic poem develops a vision of racial and/or ethnic community in which minoritarian subjects are bonded to one another by their mutual attachment to this stigmatized identity. In their accounts, Eliot envisions a form of ethnic community in which individuals embrace affiliations grounded in their own abjection from liberal humanism, which goes hand in hand with their lack of a recognized, continuous history or territorialism. If Fedalma, the subject of what Hack describes as *The Spanish Gypsy*'s "plot of unwitting passing" elects to re-attach herself to her newly discovered minoritarian identity, in other words, that new identity revolves less around the dreams of racial inheritance and territorial re-possession that will come to mark Mordecai's Zionism than around an abject present that denies her

and the Zincalí any claims to past or future possession, whether of land, blood, or communal history.[261]

One way to read *The Spanish Gypsy*, then, is as a text that asks to what extent ethnic identity requires or can be disentangled from the possessive claims that align, as Kurnick suggests, with Western nationalism, imperialism, and Zionism. To answer these questions, Eliot entered into the fray of nineteenth-century cross-racial stage romance, a genre that, as I've suggested above, could call upon visual and performative traces of slavery even when they did not depict slave/slave master romances as such. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, Eliot depicts Fedalma's progress from ostensibly self-possessed, but passing bride towards her status, at the poem's conclusion, as the representative of a complicatedly suspended form of agency devoid of both the possessiveness and willfulness that come to mark her romance with Silva. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, in other words, Eliot seeks out the anti-possessive mode of ethnic identification Hack and Kurnick describe by participating in, and then unraveling, the language and dramatic structures of the slavery melodrama I've explored above.

Early in *The Spanish Gypsy*, Eliot introduces Fedalma caught up in what Kurnick describes as an "ecstatic image" of performance, as she dances alone in front of a crowd to music performed on the Plaça Santiago:[262]

> …she, sole swayed by impulse passionate,
> Feeling all life was music and all eyes the warming quickening light that music makes,
> Moved as, in dance religious, Miriam,
> When on the Red Sea shore she raised her voice
> And led the chorus of the people's joy;
> Or as the Trojan maids that reverent sang
> Watching the sorrow-crownéd Hecuba:

[261] Hack describes the "plot of unwitting passing" (in which characters who have been raised within a majoritarian identity group discover their minoritarian identity, which they elect to attach themselves to rather than hold on to the privileges of their earlier, dominant identity) in his essay "Transatlantic Eliot: African American Connections," *A Companion to George Eliot*, edited by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 272. See also: David Kurnick, Unspeakable George Eliot," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38 (2010): 489-509, Cambridge Journals Online.

[262] David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), 84.

Moved in slow curves voluminous, gradual,
Feeling and action flowing into one
In Eden's natural taintless marriage-bond (50)

For Fedalma, the dance blends the sensual "[f]eeling" of the crowd's eyes and the minstrel's music with intrinsic, active volitional impulses, resulting in union of external world and individuated being that resembles a "marriage-bond" untainted by human differentiation. In his masterful reading of this scene, Kurnick describes this moment as marking a turning point among Eliot's work for the way in which it externalizes and disperses agency, allowing for the "refusal of the moralizing and individualizing energies such scenes customarily catalyze in Eliot's fiction"—a feat that can only be accomplished through the utopian collectivism that theatrical performance allows for and inspires.[263]

But as the poem goes on to reveal, this scene of collectivism is tied to a specific cultural history and historical memory that is not entirely freed from the problem of possessiveness that defines other Victorian dramas of race and romance. In order to understand how the possessions of this past return to disrupt the poem's present collectivism, it will be helpful to turn briefly to Lewes's discussions of cultural memory and its relationship to the individual will. Lewes often describes human will in terms that mirror the interpenetration of the external and internal worlds found in Fedalma's dance. In *Problems of Life and Mind*, he cautions readers against accepting the metaphysical fiction of the will as a transcendental or independently existing entity. Lewes denies that individuals are in possession of something called the will because he denies that the will exists as an independent entity that could ever become an object of possession, and he is skeptical of the idea that voluntary, or willed action, can ever be separated in a meaningful way from the various externalities that make up an individual's world: "There is no real essential distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions," he explains, "They all spring from Sensibility. They are all

[263] Ibid., 84.

determined by feeling."[264] Building on this framework, Lewes defines "the Will" as "the generalized expression of all volitional impulses," a perceived "law" or organizing principle that we receive an impression of from experiencing the *feeling* of volition over time.[265] For Lewes, the feeling of volition can emerge when we are faced with the illusion of a choice (which, for Lewes, is illusory because all choices are ultimately constrained by the conditions under which we are asked to make those choices). But it can also emerge from the experiences that help determine the actions an individual will take at any given moment. These experiences, however, can take a wide range of forms; they can include of-the-moment, sensory stimuli and feelings; they can also refer to the accumulation of those sensory impressions over time, which make up individual memory. Crucially, those experiences can also include something like cultural memory, the accumulation of the past experiences of those belonging to a shared culture, which they impress upon us either through present-day social interaction or further reaching forms of racial heredity. For Lewes, in other words, volition—which we might perceive as voluntary or willed—action is *always* a form of responsiveness to a combination of sensory impressions and prior experience, transforming those actions into an expression not of individuated will but rather of the ways in which the external world, social interactions, personal memory, and cultural history work together to produce discrete human actions. Lewes thus provides a distinctively Burkean conception of volition: the "laws" that govern willed actions are not transcendental but rooted in longstanding experiences and habits that accrue over time; consequently, volition can come to seem as much an outgrowth of feelings rooted in the long historical memory of a culture as a response to present circumstances and stimuli.

Lewes's concept of the will (or, rather, its lack) suggests that individuals who act in the world

[264] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, Volume 3 (Second Series) (Boston: Osgood, 1877), Google Books e-book, 422.

[265] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: Problem the First: The Study of Psychology: Its Object, Scope, and Method*, Volume 4 (Third Series) (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, and Company/The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1879), Google Books e-book, 107.

are always strangely porous to that world, both as it exists in the present and as it has taken shape over time. When Lewes considers the role of the stage actor in *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, he imagines him similarly as a figure whose performances derive from the combination of social and scenic elements that go into the making of a theatrical production:

> The truth is, we exaggerate the talent of an actor because we judge only from the effect he produces, without enquiring too curiously into the means….the actor has all the other arts as handmaids; the poet labours for him, creates his part, gives him his eloquence, his music, his imagery, his tenderness, his pathos, his sublimity; the scene-painter aids him; the costumes, the lights, the music, all the fascination of the stage—all subserve the actor's effect: these raise him upon a pedestal; remove them, and what is he? He who can make a stage-mob bend and sway with his eloquence, what could he do with a real mob, no poet to prompt him?[266]

In Lewes's description, the virtual world of the actor's "effects" looks strikingly similar to the real world of human action he describes in *Problems of Life and Mind*, in that acting and action are each the product not of individual virtuosity or will but a complex collection of outside forces that combine to produce either theatrical acts or volitional actions. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, these two circumstances—the acted and the real—come together in Fedalma's dance. In Eliot's description, Fedalma's performing body merges simultaneously with the "stage-mob" of musicians whose music has incited her dance, the "real mob" of the crowd who watches her, and the invisible force of cultural memory that first drives them together:

> Vibrations sympathetic stir all limbs
> Old men live backward in their dancing prime,
> And move in memory; small legs and arms
> With pleasant agitation purposeless
> Go up and down like pretty fruits in gales
> All long in common for the expressive act
> Yet wait for it; as in the olden time
> Men waited for the bard to tell their thought (49)

It is this intermingling of present performance and a history remembered and re-performed that Kurnick's utopian reading of this scene overlooks. While it is undoubtedly true that Fedalma merges

[266] Lewes, *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, 56-9.

with the crowd's collectivity, in doing so her performance also serves as the "expressive act" embodying a history particular to fifteenth-century Spanish culture, which Eliot portrays as a universalist hybrid of Christian and Moor, but more importantly as exclusive of the Roma who will appear in chains just a few lines later.

The role that memory plays in motivating the crowd, whose desire for some expression of that memory in turn "possesses" Fedalma when she gives herself over to the music and murmuring of that crowd, forestalls the egalitarianism of this scene in two ways. First, it puts cracks in the pure theatricality of the scene by merging mere theatrical performance with a ritualistic, culturally specific performance of Spanish memory that belongs to historical reality as much as to the virtual reality of the stage. Fedalma may be engaged in a kind of acting, but that acting is inseparable from the acting out of an ethnic history that acts on all of us in the everyday sphere of action that Lewes describes in *Problems of Life and Mind*, but that, as we will soon learn, is not Fedalma's own. Second, the entrance of cultural memory into this scene helps introduce the peril of the individual's will-lessness that the rest of the poem will have to work towards resolving: namely, that an openness to externality and to what Kurnick calls "alloeroticism" tends to slide, seemingly ineluctably, towards the closures of possession and cultural theft. If Fedalma's dance is exemplary because it allows for a moment in which the Roma Fedalma can seem possessed by the desires of the Spanish crowd in ways that echo and amplify both Lewes's vision of a porous individual volition and Kurnick's vision of theatrical collectivism, Eliot closes the scene by emphasizing the dynamics of possession that will turn out to be the grounds of the debate about racial affiliation, affection, and allegiance throughout the rest of the poem. Moments before Fedalma's glimpse of Zarca, which brings her dance to its sudden end, Eliot writes that at that dance's climax, "the crowd / Exultant shouts, forgetting poverty / In the rich moment of possessing her" (54). If the dance seems at first to promise a universalist interpenetration of self and other, it ends by resolving that vision of undifferentiated union of

Spanish and Roma back into the field of possession.

If Eliot explores the utopian potential of nineteenth-century theater, then, I want to argue that she does so by engaging with the decidedly less utopian racial dramas that were actually being performed on its stages. As if in anticipation of Zarca's arrival, in the final lines that close Fedalma's dance, Eliot re-absorbs her into a plot of possession that gives way later to a recognizable drama of Fedalma's exchange and repossession negotiated between Don Silva, her Spanish fiancé, and Zarca, her Roma father. When Fedalma learns from Zarca that she is his daughter, kidnapped years earlier by Spanish Christians and raised as their own, she is faced with a choice between marriage to Silva and her continued assimilation to Spanish Christianity, or recognition of Zarca and the resumption of the burdened ethnic identity he represents. Throughout the poem, Eliot renders this choice as a contest between competing forms of bondage that entice and threaten to enslave Fedalma, and that she must willingly choose between. When she attempts to explain this choice to Silva, she parallels her vision of Zarca "with iron on his limbs," to his enchaining look which "Seemed to have travelled far to find me there / And grasp me—claim this festal life of mine / As heritage of sorrow, chill my blood / With the cold iron of some unknown bonds" (76-7), and to which Silva responds by asking her to more speedily "bear the yoke of love" by marrying him. Later, when Silva asks Zarca to consent to their marriage (in exchange for which, Silva claims, "My wealth shall be your treasury" (222)), Zarca sneers,

> My thanks!
> To me you offer liberal price; for her
> Your love's beseeching will be force supreme.
> She will go with you as a willing slave,
> Will give a word of parting to her father,
> Wave farewells to her tribe, then turn and say,
> "Now, my lord, I am nothing but your bride;
> I am quite culled have neither root nor trunk
> Now wear me with your plume!" (223)

The Spanish Gypsy yokes together marriage and racial bondage within the singular figure of Fedalma,

who must negotiate not only the choice between modern lover and warrior father, marriage's elective affinities and the family's blood alliances, majority and minority identities, but also the paradoxical language of willing choice and constraining bondage with which not only Eliot but also Silva and Zarca seek to frame these choices. Like *The Creole* or *The Octoroon*, *The Spanish Gypsy* situates Fedalma at the intersection of heterosexual exchange and the burdens of ethnicity's genealogical inheritance that have led to the Zincali's bondage at the poem's opening; in contrast to those earlier performances, however, Fedalma is left to decide which frame to bind herself to in the course of the drama.

When Fedalma ultimately decides to resume her Zincalí identity, then, she also affirms Zarca's claim that her marriage to Don Silva represented a form of "willing slavery." Fedalma herself recasts her romance with Silva as a form of catastrophic willfulness that has brought about the poem's tragic ending:

> Fedalma.
> Speak it not! Calamity
> Comes like a deluge and o'erfloods our crimes,
> Till sin is hidden in woe. You—I—we two
> Grasping we knew not what, that seemed delight,
> Opened the sluices of that deep.
>
> Don Silva.
> We two?
> Fedalma, you were blameless, helpless.
>
> Fedalma.
> No!
> It shall not be that you did aught alone.
> For when we loved I willed to reign in you,
> And I was jealous even of the day
> If it could gladden you apart from me.

For Fedalma, the conflict between marital choice and family allegiance recasts their romance as an over-extension of the will that has invited the punishment Eliot has meted out to her by the poem's end. In seeking to portray Fedalma's marriage to Silva not just as willing but as a form of willful

tyranny that risked turning Fedalma into Silva's ornamental possession, Eliot calls back to the earlier scene of Fedalma's dance, which promised a union of Spanish memory and the Roma body, encapsulated by Fedalma's "ecstatic" performance of self-possessed theatricality, but ended instead with the crowd's grasping "possession." In both cases, Eliot portrays Fedalma's will as, fundamentally, a problem of possession: for Fedalma to act as if she possesses a free will puts her at risk of the claims of Western (in this case, Spanish) possession. For Lewes, what we perceive as the "Will" is both a fiction that stands beyond the bounds of possession and a law shaped out of the inchoate pressures the external world, past and present, exerts upon us. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that it is in those moments when characters grasp at the expression and possession of an individuated will that they are met most forcefully with the constraints not only of present conditions but also, more importantly, of cultural history. In the same way, when Eliot reports at the poem's end that Fedalma has found herself not nurturing the Zincalí community, but instead bearing witness to its disintegration, Eliot points towards willfulness as the cause: "the tribe / That was to be the ensign of the race, / And draw it into conscious union, / Itself would break in small and scattered bands / That, living on scant prey, would still disperse and propagate forgetfulness" though not for any reason beyond "the wilful [sic] wish / To fashion their own service" (277). Their desire to act as if in possession of an individuated will has broken their bonds of sociality and memory, so that the Zincalí produce only "forgetfulness" rather than reproduce a future ethnic community. Rather than become a mother to Spanish or Zincalí offspring, Fedalma instead becomes "as the funeral urn that bears / The ashes of a leaders," tasked with watching over the suspended life of a people without a clearly mapped future or memories of their past.

In his essay "Unspeakable George Eliot," Kurnick argues that in *The Spanish Gypsy*'s generic inconsistency, and its aesthetics of "fragmentation" and "interruption," "Eliot is exploring…the possibility of a form that would resist the hardening of form itself—and the possibility of a

community that would resist the closure and reification of community itself."[267] To this project we might add that Eliot also seems to seek out a form of action without a tyrannical will, and a form of self-possessed identity without possessiveness or possession. Significantly, Eliot arrives at this aim by working back through the paradoxes and performances of slavery that played out on nineteenth-century stages, crafting a heroine whose story draws together marriage's heterosexual exchange and the burden of ethnic affiliation, in order to parse the meaning and relative value of each mode of constraint, and to draw distinctions between those forms of social obligation that recapitulate or transcend the "willing slavery" to which Eliot finds Fedalma to be vulnerable. Noticing just how closely Eliot aligns *The Spanish Gypsy* within the theatrical frame of the slavery melodrama, however, also makes visible the significant gaps between Fedalma's story of cross-ethnic romance and willing slavery and the stories of characters like Louise Fauriel and Zoe, subject to the nineteenth-century slavery economy. As the daughter of a fifteenth-century Roma chief, Fedalma is no more a legal slave than Planché's Rachel. Thus her story, which turns on marriage as a means by which both the theft of a daughter and the cultural theft of assimilation might have been effected, nonetheless entails a cultural theft of Fedalma, or more accurately Eliot's, own, as Eliot appropriates African American slavery (and its performance on stage) as a metaphor for the plight of the Spanish Roma. The *Spanish Gypsy* is not only fragmented prosodically and generically, as Kurnick argues, but also historically, as Fedalma traverses temporal, geographical, and cultural frames in order to act out both the history of the Spanish Roma and a nineteenth-century drama of American slavery and segregation that jars with the poem's early modern contexts. But while Eliot's poem traverses historical and cultural frames in its aesthetics, in its plot, the poem concludes with Fedalma and the Zincalí stalled between a 'forgetful' past and the ashes of an immolated future, between performances of unity and self-possession and the threat of disintegration that willful action poses

[267] David Kurnick, "Unspeakable George Eliot," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38 (2010): 497.

to those performances, suggesting that the problem of possession has not been resolved so much as suspended in the poem's closing scenes.

In *The Spanish Gypsy*, the relationship between the drama of familial possession in which Fedalma finds herself and the cultural appropriation that makes that drama legible to nineteenth-century readers remains muted. In the next section, I will argue that in *Daniel Deronda*, the relationship between the text's contests over the possession of its characters—British and Jewish alike—and the acts of narrative appropriation that undergird those contests comes to be central to the novel, in both its content and form. While the cultural appropriation of blackness always provided significant theatrical scaffolding for the staging of slavery, race, and interracial romance in nineteenth-century melodrama, a set of more experimental performances sought to interrogate the relationship between these romances, anti-racist activism, and minstrelsy's appropriative theatrical frames in more direct ways. In the section that follows, I will explore this alternative history of racial performance as the more specific performance genealogy to which Eliot's final novel belongs.

Daniel Deronda's Performance History

On June 12th, 1876, Eliot received the final proofs for *Deronda* while visiting Paris with Lewes.[268] The next day, Lewes returned the proofs to Blackwood, with a letter briefly detailing their trips to the Salon and to the Paris theaters: "Tonight we close our gaieties with L'Étrangère — we were last night at the Français and the night before at the Odéon, but now unless the open air theatres of Italy I don't fancy we shall have any more theatricals."[269] The play, *L'Étrangère*, a social comedy by Alexandre Dumas *fils*, starred Sarah Bernhardt in the part of a Southern ex-slave, Mrs. Clarkson (the play's eponymous "Foreigner"). In her youth, Mrs. Clarkson avenges herself on her

[268] Haight, *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 9, n. 340.

[269] George Henry Lewes to John Blackwood, Paris, 13 June 1876, *The George Eliot Letters*, 179. Haight notes that Lewes later added a note to his diary, "Very much interested both in piece and acting" (*The George Eliot Letters*, Volume 9, n. 340).

father, a slave master who separated her from her mother by selling them both at auction, by escaping from slavery, marrying a wealthy businessman, and fleeing with a part of his fortune to help bring about the downfall of her father's white sons back in Charleston. Now living as a wealthy eccentric in Paris who has made her money by courting and cheating men of their fortunes, the play centers on Mrs. Clarkson's role in brokering the mercenary marriage of the innocent young Catherine to a dissolute duke, and her attempts to foil a more sincere love match between Catherine and another man. In the play, slavery's exchanges are relegated to the realm of narrated back-story, as Mrs. Clarkson narrates rather than dramatizes for audiences her family genealogy in an extended monologue:

> Here is the truth: I am the daughter and granddaughter of slaves. My ancestors have probably been captured on the coast of Africa and sold in the markets of Louisiana and South Carolina. That is my genealogy. My mother was a mulatto, in other words, my grandmother had married or loved a negro. It seems that my mother was good-looking, and that her master, a rich planter, who had been married before, and was the father of two sons, condescended to notice her. I am the offspring of this notice. In coming into the world, I was not legally the daughter, but I was legally the property of my father. … In 1856, my father sent us, my mother and myself, to Charleston, to be there sold at auction. They led us into a hall filled with the same kind of cattle as ourselves, and made us mount a platform. You may picture to yourself the tableau: on one side the human merchandise, on the other the purchasers; the auctioneer on our side. It was done, by auction just as at a market place.[270]

The "tableau" Mrs. Clarkson describes would, of course, have been easy to imagine for audiences familiar with the iconography of the slave auction—or with its performance in Boucicault's *The Octoroon*. But in Dumas *fils*'s version, the drama of slavery has been absorbed into the past, to be dramatized not in a performance of the slave auction but instead in the social drama of financial and romantic transactions and exchange that unfold as part of the play's progress towards the true marriage of innocent hearts, and their triumph over the machinations of dissipate aristocrats and

[270] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *The Foreigner: Complete French and English Text* (New York: Chickering, [1881?]), 101-3.

scheming ex-slaves alike. While earlier comedies such as Scribe's *Une Chaîne* had mined slavery discourse for commentary on the strictures of love and social manners, Dumas *fils*'s play makes the historical drama of slavery itself into a vivid kind of scene-setting for its modern marriage plot, while at the same time presenting the familiar tableaus of the nineteenth-century slave melodrama as a genealogy for its own cynical depiction of marriage as a market of brokered exchange.

If Eliot and Lewes's choice of entertainment for the evening, and the end of their theatrical season, was entirely coincidental, it seems nonetheless fitting that Eliot celebrated the completion of *Deronda*, and what would mark the end of her career as novelist, in the audience of the Odéon that evening. As a novel pervaded equally by the theater, from high to low, and by the history of slavery, figurative and literal, it is not difficult to see Eliot's last novel as a foreign relative to Dumas *fils*'s play, even if their resemblance could only have been discovered after the process of composition was complete. Like *L'Étrangère*, *Daniel Deronda* grapples with the afterlife not just of slavery's global history, but also of the way that history was performed on nineteenth-century stages, and like Dumas *fils*, Eliot demands that readers trace a genealogy that leads from the drawing rooms of domestic realism backwards to the traumas of the American slave plantation. But where Dumas *fils*'s drama shows no compunction about allowing the ex-slave to be recast as society's villain whose social defeat will finally consign the enmities and crimes of the plantation and the world of aristocratic wealth that brought it about to the past, Eliot's novel, I will argue, explores ways of representing slavery's afterlife that might keep that history present in order to imagine new orientations towards both the past and future of the Atlantic's racial order.

At the conclusion of Book II of *Daniel Deronda*, Mirah Lapidoth formally introduces her story to the Meyricks, and to the novel's readers as a fugitive:

> 'My name is Mirah Lapidoth. I am come a long way, all the way from Prague by myself. I made my escape. I ran away from dreadful things. I came to find my mother and brother in London. I had been taken from my mother when I was little, but I thought I could find her again. I had trouble—the houses were all gone—I

> could not find her. It has been a long while, and I had not much money. That is why I am in distress.' (201)

In the story that follows, Mirah goes on to explain that she was kidnapped by her father and brought on board a ship to America, where she was forced to perform theatrical labor on the American stage before returning to Europe, where she has made her dramatic escape. In her description of her kidnapping and fugitivity, separation from her family, and above all her coerced performances, Mirah aligns herself with the fugitive slave narratives that circulated in tandem with the nineteenth-century slavery melodrama in print and on the Victorian stage. But in addition to recalling the slave past, Mirah's story also foreshadows events from the novel's future. In Book VII, Grandcourt also finds himself setting sail with a woman carried onboard against her will:

> In taking his wife with him on a yachting expedition, Grandcourt had no intention to get rid of her; on the contrary, he wanted to feel more securely that she was his to do as he liked with, and to make her feel it also….He had reasons for carrying Gwendolen out of reach, but they were not reasons that can seem black in the merest statement. He suspected a growing opposition in her….But now enter into the soul of this young creature as she found herself, with the blue Mediterranean dividing her from the world, on the tiny plank-island of a yacht, the domain of the husband to whom she felt that she had sold herself, and had been paid the strict price — nay, paid more than she dared to ask in the handsome maintenance of her mother: — the husband to whom she had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he held them throttled in silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would, without remonstrance. (668-9)

Both Gwendolen and Mirah offer to readers a performance of slavery, "collared and dragged" by male hands through alienating waters that speed them away from their homes and their mothers towards undetermined fates. But where Mirah re-performs the scene of the slave ship, Gwendolen's tableau at sea, coming over four hundred pages later, forms less a performance of slavery than a repetition of Mirah's earlier performance—an appropriation that turns the slave ship into a re-enacted scene internal to the novel, reverberating across its pages.

In *Freedom's Empire*, Laura Doyle reads these two interlinked scenes as evidence of what she calls the novel's "America-England-Mediterranean circuit"—a circuit that ultimately finds Eliot

"strategically redirecting colonial-Atlantic 'energies' and rewriting the Atlantic narrative in order (not necessarily consciously) to redeploy it…in the Mediterranean, the scene of a more immediate future."[271] Doyle situates Eliot's novel at the end of a trajectory of what Doyle calls the "race narrative of liberty," which casts Anglo-Saxon racial whiteness as a kind of adhesion that binds free citizens to one another, counterbalancing, and therefore providing support for, the liberty of those citizens to operate independently of one another and of their native England—a principle that was most useful for those white citizens who left England to colonize the Americas.[272] In Doyle's reading, Gwendolen's alienation onboard Grandcourt's Mediterranean yacht, and the Atlantic Middle Passage it openly alludes to, signifies the way in which white women's freedoms could be achieved at the expense of the colonies, and their constraints under the "sexual contract" embedded within the colonial economy. By contrast, Mirah represents "a transmuted, palimpsestic Afro-Jewishness…that allows [Eliot] to recast the Anglo appropriation of the African-Atlantic middle passage as a kind of Jewish middle passage requiring the righteous founding of a Jewish homeland"—one that ultimately allows Mirah to escape the threat of American "amalgamation" for a restored racial purity in Palestine.[273] In doing so, Doyle argues, Mirah also comes to represent a new trajectory for the narrative of Anglo-Saxon liberty, as Eliot sought to imagine a future disentangled from the recent history of race and freedom in the Americas, but reborn in equally racializing and paternalizing forms in the Middle East.

Reading Mirah and Gwendolen's scenes onboard the novel's metaphorical slave ships as reinterpretations not just of that American past, but also of one another, invites us, however, to consider the work of cross-racial identification and affiliation within the novel, which complicates

[271] Laura Doyle, *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008), 342, 347.

[272] Ibid., 342.

[273] Ibid., 348.

the dynamics of appropriation and renewed colonial domination that Doyle describes. For while the novel's plot might seem to aim for what Hack and Kurnick describe as an "ethnic separatism" that would drive apart Jews and English Christians, in parallel to the African-American and white American subjects whose "amalgamation" Doyle argues haunts Mirah's American passage, I will argue that the novel's aesthetics of cross-racial performance fundamentally resist that separatism at the level of form and bring to the fore a more ironic, and at times critical, stance towards racial history and its reproduction than Doyle's account allows.

In Kurnick's reading of the novel, he offers one account of what this performative relationship to race might look like in the novel: "Almost all of the characters in *Daniel Deronda* believe that ethnicity is destiny. But insofar as those characters resemble a cast…they are haunted by a sense of their potential interchangeability—their status as members of a collective body we could call George Eliot's lot."[274] But if the history of racial performance on the nineteenth-century stage teaches us anything, it is that race in the nineteenth century was above all resistant to the kinds of interchangeable performances Kurnick describes, at least in its pre-eminent form, the blackface minstrel show. While minstrelsy, like melodrama, often worked to police the frames of identity and affiliation that circumscribed the lives of the black characters portrayed on the Victorian stage, some critics have argued that minstrelsy could also operate otherwise, as a form of performative play that might share the flexibility of Kurnick's interchangeable performances. For those critics, the British blackface minstrel mask in particular allowed white performers and audiences to slip free of the restraints of Victorian convention into a "ludic" zone of pleasure, whose "significance," in Michael Pickering's words, "lay just as much in the cultural permit it gave to otherwise unavailable versions of license, display, and release" for white audiences and performers as in its role in codifying anti-

[274] Kurnick, *Empty Houses*, 103.

black racism for the modern era.[275] In this interpretation, blackface minstrelsy comes to symbolize the freedom and flexibility that performance theorists often ascribe to the zone of performativity more broadly, or what Victor Turner describes as the liminal "betwixt and between state" where socially circumscribed actions can give way to the more improvisatory or subjunctive modes of acting in and imagining the world.[276]

This conflict over the meaning of blackface minstrelsy thus represents a more fundamental bifurcation at the heart of the meaning of "performance." On the one hand, performance is defined simply as the acting out of a dramatic or narrative script in front of an audience—a script that, as critics of blackface minstrelsy argue, often works to foreclose the very subjects it claims to represent. This conception of performance, broadly speaking, conforms to the definition Butler offers of "performativity": "a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered [or, in this case, racialized] subject."[277] Though the performance of these conventions is non-voluntary, however, neither is it fully constraining for as Butler explains, these compulsory acts of citation are also "the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged."[278]

Responding to writers who would embrace minstrelsy as an instance of this more flexible, deconstructive mode of performance, however, Tavia Nyongó has more recently cautioned that for African American subjects who sought publicity of their own, "exposing the social construction of race could never have simply congealed…into a 'performative' alternative to essentialist discourses

[275] Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, xiii. For a discussion of the way in which minstrelsy allowed white audiences to believe that black identity was subject to white imagination and production, see Pickering, Nyongó, Hartman.

[276] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), 121.

[277] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (November 1993): 22.

[278] Ibid., 22.

of race, status, or gender" for several reasons.[279] First, because blackface minstrelsy was always rooted in a "theft" that brought blackness into being as a cultural entity and identity in the very act of stealing it away from African Americans. Early blackface minstrelsy thus invented the racial essentialism it purported to subvert, and gave blackness value by making it into a stolen property, foreshadowing minstrelsy's rampant commodification throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[280] And second, because minstrel acts were always overshadowed by the specter of another mode of cross-racial affiliation, the cross-racial romance, which carried with it the threat of miscegenation's racial corruption and the promise of amalgamation's racial restoration and transformation. Blackface minstrelsy could thus be read as a kind of performative embodiment of amalgamation's heterosexual, reproductive union—one that mirrored a national romance consumed, alternately, with fears of interracial intercourse and the "dream of a transracial future," which represent equally essentializing and melodramatic responses to racial inequality that slavery worked to create.[281]

Where Doyle aligns Eliot with a desire for restored ethnic separatism in the "real world" of the novel's imperial stages, Kurnick proposes the theater as an alternative site where fixed ethnic identity can give way to universalist collaborations that unfix, and render transposable, those identities. But both of these accounts overlook the specific, and more complicated, form that ethnic and racial identification took on the nineteenth-century stage. Minstrelsy and melodrama formalized a mode of racial representation that could be both self-consciously performative, transformative, and fixated on transgressing the essentialist bounds of ethnic identity, and yet at the same time racializing and reactionary. These performance modes embraced a romance of cross-racial affiliation

[279] Nyongó, *The Amalgamation Waltz*, 130.

[280] See: Nyongó, "Minstrel Trouble: Racial Travesty in the Circum-Atlantic Fold," *The Amalgamation Waltz*, 103-134.

[281] Nyongó, *The Amalgamation Waltz*, 30-1.

that sought either to exaggerate racial otherness so as to discipline it, or to render it invisible by absorbing it back into an assimilationist white future embodied by a "white object" like *The Creole*'s Louise Fauriel. If we wish to read Eliot's turn to the theater in *Deronda* as a resource for thinking through the problem of ethnic identity and cross-ethnic affiliation, we will need to do so without removing these more historically-specific performance practices from our frame of reference. Eliot's novel did not simply recapitulate the dynamics of minstrelsy and melodrama discussed in the previous section; instead, Eliot aligns her novel with a series of experimental racial performances that were designed to critique those more conventional performances. These experiments offer examples of what it might look like to use performance as an instrument of antislavery and anti-racist critique while keeping prevailing histories of racism on stage and the aesthetics of the minstrel show firmly within view.

Experiments in Cross-Racial Performance: T. W. Robertson's *The Half Caste*, William and Ellen Craft's *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, and Autograph ABP's *Black Chronicles II* Exhibition

In Pickering's account, minstrelsy's cross-racial performances can be understood as a "modern" form because they relied upon audiences' discernment of the gaps between realistic representation and theatrical invention. The process of "blacking up"—of covering white skin with burnt cork makeup—asked audiences to believe that they were viewing "genuine" black bodies, while setting these acts within the openly theatrical world of the minstrel show, which could swerve between standup comedy, and pathetic song, drama and dance, shedding the pretenses of realism's narrative continuities. The disjunction between minstrelsy's claims to representativeness and its denial of any fidelity to the real was, in Pickering's description, its defining feature. Minstrelsy makeup, Pickering writes,

> raised the question as to whether what [the minstrel mask] represented was real or imaginary, but in raising it, minstrelsy confounded it, so that it was never clear where the answer finally lay. What it represented was both real *and* imaginary because it blurred the distinction between them, taking it beyond mere mimicry in the interests

> of racial mockery, but never attaining credibility as being, indisputably, the genuine article. This is what made minstrelsy distinctively modern, for its audiences could believe in the reality represented while also acknowledging it as a simulacrum. The simulacrum was itself real, there on the stage as a visual spectacle. What it portrayed could be related to what was absent from it, the 'real' negro, or understood as images of black Otherness that nevertheless had a 'real' presence as a subject of entertainment. Minstrelsy played on this ambivalence, encouraging through its patchwork of generically varying items a to-and-from movement between illusion and reality, presence and absence, viewer and viewed.[282]

In Hartman's discussions of the theaters of nineteenth-century blackness, she argues that "the 'real' negro" Pickering alludes to could never, in fact, have been the minstrel mask's referent because minstrelsy colluded with melodrama and the spectacles of terror found on the slavery plantation specifically to efface and replace black subjectivity with a humanity produced, packaged, and projected back onto black bodies by a white supremacist culture. Hartman's reading instead suggests that the offstage "real" to which minstrelsy referred was slavery's violence, represented by the minstrel show's comic "blows" to the blackface body, rather than the black subject that minstrelsy's "fun" helped efface.[283] Both readings suggest, however, that minstrelsy thrived on what Pickering describes as audiences' perception of the discordances between a performance reality and its dissimulation: "[t]he fact of frame and frame-break was an integral aesthetic feature of the spectacle of British minstrelsy. The recognition and acceptance of inversion within a bracketed, time-out interval of ordinary life would have required an understanding of the realist elements within a modifying context where both the construction and deconstruction of illusion jostled for prominence."[284] Rather than understand minstrelsy as an anomaly of nineteenth-century popular culture, Pickering instead argues that it may in fact have helped give rise to modernism's transgression of the realist "frame."

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[282] Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 156-7.

[283] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 27.

[284] Pickering, *British Blackface*, 103.

While blackface minstrelsy acts in practice policed black bodies, the underlying aesthetics of their cross-racial performances, in Daphne Brooks's account, played an important part "in the making of a spectacularly incongruous body *as* a performance strategy unto itself."[285] As an "uncanny" figure who moved between white and black racialization, the minstrel body belonged to a broader phenomenon of what Brooks describes as the "racial phantasmagoria" of the transatlantic stage. The "fundamental attraction of the phantasmagoria show," Brooks writes,

> resided in its ability to stage the illusion of ephemeral bodies—'phantoms'—parading before audiences while altering in size, advancing toward and retreating away from spectator, and passing into and through one another. Appearing to be both riddled with ontological breaks and ruptures and yet fluid and concatenate, these metaphoric and 'discontinuous' bodies floated through an evolving English popular culture imaginary.[286]

Applying these phantasmagoric techniques to the production of racialized bodies on stage, the minstrelsy show helped produce a body similarly defined by the ephemerality, multiplicity, and spectrality of its racial identification. But whereas the traditional minstrel show produced the excessive, out-of-bounds body in order to violently return it to its proper frame, Brooks argues that African American performers drew upon similar techniques in order to develop resistant, anti-racist performances, which, by "layering aliases and costumes, devices and genres atop one another…demonstrate the insurgent power of imagining cultural identity in grand and polyvalent terms which might outsize the narrow representational frames bestowed on them."[287]

Thus minstrelsy's underlying commitment to aesthetic discordance helped some nineteenth-century theatrical artists exploit its racial burlesque for very different purposes. The examples I will turn to briefly here—T. W. Robertson's *The Half Caste*, the English adaptation of Plouvier's *Le Sang-Mêlé*, first performed in 1856, William and Ellen Craft's 1850s stage lectures and their 1860

[285] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 25.

[286] Ibid., 15.

[287] Ibid., 8.

published fugitive slave narrative *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, and nineteenth-century images drawn from the 2014 photography exhibition *Black Chronicles II*—illustrate how minstrelsy's tonally discordant, cross-racial performance dynamics came to function as both an object of critique and a mode through which self-possession could be effected for ex-slave characters and activists within the context of these performances. Both Robertson and the Crafts trouble existing scripts of racial subjection through acts of parody and defamiliarization that break the "frame" of racial and theatrical representation and draw attention to discordances between reality and illusion, much as the minstrel show did. At the same time, these performances portray the world of the urban theater as a site where slavery's system of possession and exploitation might be replaced by new forms of economic self-determinism and artistic self-possession that can likewise emerge in those moments when one pretends to be that which she is not. But reading these performances in relationship to images of black performance staged by Autography ABP's exhibition reminds us that the legacy of experiments in racial performance we have received remains an ambivalent site for the critique of Victorian racism.

On its surface, Robertson's *The Half Caste* would seem to belong to the genre of slave melodramas explored in the previous section of this chapter. The play centers on the story of the Creole or "half caste" Sebastian Cabrera, an escaped white slave who wins his freedom by ruining the financial prospects of his master, M. De Grandet's, Guadeloupe plantation. As the play opens, Sebastian has escaped to Switzerland, where he first trades identities with Lord Falconer, an English gentleman, and then disposes of Falconer in order to maintain his stolen identity. Sebastian then goes to Paris where he falls in love with Eugenie, a young woman who is engaged to Oscar, an artist of unknown origins. As the play proceeds, we discover that Eugenie is De Grandet's daughter, leading De Grandet, Eugenie and Oscar to hatch a scheme to force Sebastian to reveal his true origins. In the process, we learn that Oscar is Sebastian's long-lost brother, a fact that Oscar only

comes to realize in the midst of his attempts to entrap Sebastian. At the play's conclusion, Lord Falconer returns unharmed and Sebastian's true identity is revealed. Unmasked and rejected by Eugenie and his own brother, Sebastian confronts De Grandet for a final time before swallowing the "poisoned pearl" that Falconer has given him at the play's opening and with the words, "I join thee in the land where all are equal—where the slave is free," dies on stage.[288] As a story about an ex-slave who finds himself in love with his master's daughter before surrendering to suicide, *The Half Caste* joins *The Creole* and *The Octoroon* in staging the romance and destruction of the plantation family, albeit set in Paris rather than the colonies. And like those plays, *The Half Caste* marries pathos and comedy, tragedy and farce to present a world where the sorrows of slavery alternate unsettlingly with the racist humor of the minstrel stage. But *The Half Caste* is also distinct for the way it pushes these strange stage conventions to their limits, drawing on the discordances of racial performance to encourage a more reflective mode of spectatorship that at times resists the closures of the melodrama's conventional scripts.

The play's various melodramatic peripeteia unfold around a set of metatheatrical performances in which characters adopt a pose that both does and does not reflect their reality in complicated ways. The most sustained performance comes from Sebastian, who must play the part of a white lord in order to evade recapture as a slave. Though Sebastian is explicitly described as "white," the play nonetheless exaggerates this exchange of identities as a kind of cross-racial farce. For while Sebastian sets out to become a convincing European noble, Falconer satirically performs the part of the escaped slave. Like Sebastian, Falconer seeks to "pass" under the name of another to escape a "master"—not a slaveholder, but instead a woman Falconer has been contracted to marry in order to receive an inheritance from a distant relative. Later, this farcical exchange of identities is

[288] T. W. Robertson, *The Half Caste; or, the Poisoned Pearl. A Drama in Three Acts (Adapted from the French) by T. W. Robertson*, (London: Samuel French & Son, 1872), Literature Online, 36. Hereafter cited in text.

confirmed when Falconer, not Sebastian, recounts his daring escape from the peril into which Sebastian had thrown him for a crowd of onlookers who erupt at his tale with shouts of, "Extraordinary! Wonderful! What an escape" (32). While this exchange of identities is largely played for comedy, it is underwritten by the much darker story of Sebastian's original escape from slavery, which centers around a gruesome scene of cross-racial sexual exchange:

> Sebastian: Calm yourself and listen. I had a little brother on whom I doted. I had a wife, who gave me hopes that she might one day bless me with a child. One summer's day, my wife, my little brother, and myself were at work in your plantation—working for you—when you passed with Mademoiselle De Grandet by your side, and a friend—a visitor who had just arrived. My wife was handsome—Your friend remarked it. You answered him gaily, "Well, as she seems to suit your taste, take her—I give her to you."
>
> De Grandet: Ruffian! you threw your arms round my wife's neck with the fury of a lion!
>
> Sebastian: I did, and pressed my slave's lips to her patrician mouth, and shouted to you—"Can you now feel what a man feels who sees violence offered to the wife of his bosom—the mother of his child?" You ordered me to be branded on the arm with a red-hot iron. Your wife had my wife whipped so cruelly that in three days she died, bearing with her to the grave the fruits of our unhappy union. (28)

It is this originary scene of exchange—in which de Grandet's economic possession of Sebastian's wife is matched by Sebastian's sexual possession of De Grandet's wife—that spurs the much lighter fare of exchanged names and fugitive escapes from the hands of a bride that fuels that farce between Falconer and Sebastian. But while we may be tempted to read this reconfiguration of tropes and images as simply of a part with a minstrel and melodramatic culture that could turn slavery into grist for the entertainment mill, Robertson's text includes a set of denser, more complex metatheatrical moments that seem intent on provoking audiences to reflect on the strained relationship between slavery's real history and its representation on stage.

When De Grandet discovers Sebastian in France, Eugenie determines to help her father by unmasking Sebastian as her father's former slave. To do so, she pretends to have fallen in love with Sebastian and asks him to travel with her out of France to the colonies, hoping to sweep him up in

an abolitionist fervor and lure him into revealing his own colonial past: "Let us strike the manacles from hands that seem that they were born to fetters! Let us give freedom to the slave! (*Sebastian starts*) Let us avenge the martyred negro! They are our own brethren! Let us aid them! Let us set them free! Let us visit their tyrants' coast! Let us go east, west, to Guadeloupe!" (23). Significantly, Eugenie's antislavery rhetoric alerts Sebastian to the fact that she has laid a trap for him—a trap he avoids by pretending that he will go along with Eugenie's plan. In this scene of theatrical brinkmanship, antislavery discourse and its alliance with romantic heroics comes to occupy an unstable place with respect to the drama that surrounds it. By performing the inflated rhetoric of the abolitionist drama and then deflating it through Eugenie's self-conscious distance from that rhetoric and its antislavery sympathies, the play appears to mock the antislavery romance. But it could also be read otherwise, as reflecting back on the conditions under which the actor who plays Sebastian Cabrera acts out the more sincere moment, later in the play, when Sebastian recounts the horrors of the slavery system. On stage, the part of Sebastian was undoubtedly played by a white European or English actor: the published playtext for Plouvier's *Le Sang-Mêlé* lists Fechter, the German actor whose Othello Lewes castigated as a "half caste" in his reviews, in the role of the play's hero; the playtext for Robertson's translation lists "Mr. Creswick," presumably the William Creswick who managed the Surrey during the play's initial run. Thus, Sebastian's own antislavery passion comes to audiences wrapped in layers of theatrical distance and appropriation that mirror Eugenie's performance here, merging melodramatic sincerity and metatheatrical irony to produce a defamiliarized version of melodrama's tragic script of racial suffering. In order to read Eugenie's performance accurately, audiences had to sift through a set of competing performances and realities—Eugenie's performed love for Sebastian and her real love for her slave master father, Sebastian's real love for Eugenie, his discovery of her performance, and his re-performance of that love for her benefit. In this way, the scene could also be thought of as helping train audiences to

reflect on the cross-ethnic exchanges that go into Fechter or Creswick's performances of Sebastian, which require playgoers to read the figure on stage as the "half caste" Sebastian, the English Falconer, and the white actor who played these parts simultaneously. Though Sebastian was likely not performed in blackface, the performance nonetheless borrowed on the discordant structures of minstrelsy's racial performances, while at the same time producing scenes, like Eugenie's, that open up opportunities to reflect critically upon those structures and the play's attitude towards them.

The discordance between the "realism" of racial representation and the illusions of racial impersonation come together most explicitly in Sebastian's exchange with his brother Oscar. When Eugenie sets out to lure Sebastian into revealing his true identity, she recruits Oscar to play the part of the lost brother Sebastian has been seeking. Neither character suspects that Oscar really is Sebastian's brother; instead, that information reveals itself to him as Oscar plays his part in his dialogue with Sebastian. To verify his identity, Sebastian asks Oscar to produce a medal that once belonged to his brother, which prompts Oscar's buried memories of his real past life as a slave:

> Sebas.
> It was a silver medal, and the mountebanks would have stolen it from you to sell it.
>
> Oscar. (*who begins to remember facts, and hardly can separate the realities he feels he remembers, and the lies that he assumes*)
> Possibly—but it seems to me that I had such a medal, and that I slept with my finger twined in the ribbon. …
>
> Sebas. (*watching him*)
> Do you think you have ever seen any other country than this.
>
> Oscar.
> I—I—I think that I remember—as if in a dream—that when I was very little I saw many faces about me—black-faced negroes (*aside*) that is true. I do not seem to myself to tell a lie. (25)

This blurring to remembered truth and present lie continues until Oscar finally declares: "oh, my mind wanders—it can no longer distinguish fiction from reality" (26). Like Daniel and Fedalma, Oscar finds himself in a "plot of unwitting passing." But in this scene, Robertson complicates that

plot by asking Oscar to act out memories of a slave past that he has lost and now recovers. While within the diegetic frame of the play, this performance leads Oscar towards the recovery of his "real" racial history, the scene also gestures beyond this frame towards the fictional, cross-racial performance in which the actor who plays Oscar is engaged. Thus at the climactic reassertion of the bonds of blood and racial genealogy, the play also invites readers to reflect on the performative dimensions of race. While within the play, the real and the fictional coalesce in the story of Oscar's past, in other words, this moment only serves to draw our attention to the ways in which believing in this story requires us to suspend our awareness of the cross-ethnic performance that subtends it. Like the minstrel act, in other words, Robertson's play turns, in part, on the discordances between fiction and reality in the representation of race, but it also registers the ways in which those discordances ripple through the lives of its characters within the action and emotions of the play itself.

While in this climactic scene, the discordances of theatricality and reality come together to produce a moment of tragic self-recognition, elsewhere in the play the theater presents Oscar with the possibility for artistic self-determination. Oscar enters the play as an artist of unknown parentage at work on a pair of paintings entitled "Despair" and "Hope" that feature the likenesses of himself and Eugenie, respectively. The only artist figure we see in the play, it appears that Oscar possesses true talent though he lives in poverty. His first appearance on stage takes place in Fifine's apartment behind her flower shop in the Passage de l'Opera, where Fifine and Oscar's fiancée Eugenie spend their days painting artificial flowers for the Opera. Like Oscar, Eugenie initially appears as an exile, forced from her home (in circumstances that are somewhat confusingly glossed over), and now living a life apart from her family in the urban theater district. Before the re-appearance of the De Grandets and Sebastian onstage, then, the image that we get of Oscar and Eugenie is of a kind of bohemian family living and working at the fringes of Paris's artistic community. Aligned with Fifine,

who paints not valuable portraits but disposable flowers and ornaments for the stage, Oscar belongs to a world not only of artistry but also of artifice, in which what is valued most are not what is essential or in-born, but the skill with which one can disguise, construct, and fake appearances for the sake of art. The play's end, meanwhile, promises that Oscar will put this skill to use in life as well as in art, as Robertson suggests that he will resume passing, this time knowingly, by taking Lord Falconer's name and marrying Eugenie De Grandet, his former master's daughter. The result seems neither happy nor chilling, but merely ironic: at the end of a performance of the slave past, perhaps the most fitting end this formerly enslaved character can achieve is a continued performance of European dandyism and a marriage that will extend rather than put an end to the interracial genealogy that Oscar has uncovered.

In the play's closing scene, as Sebastian and guests at a ball prepare to dance a quadrille, a minor character rushes on to warn them: "gentleman, you are dancing on the dead" (35). The ball, we discover, takes place on the site of a graveyard where Sebastian's father, also a slave, has been buried. In a curious way, Robertson seems to suggest that his play, like Oscar Cabrera, like the guests at the ball, has been playing upon the history of slavery's dead who are never far from its modern frame. In doing so, he invites audiences not just to enjoy but also to be jarred by the discordances between racial realities and their performance on stage in which his own play so readily participates. In its conclusion, however, Robertson finally leaves ambiguous whether the act of acknowledging and remembering slavery's past can ever be separated from the compromised performances of the living, characters and actors alike.

While Robertson's drama made visible the ways in which racial identity could turn upon a performance that limned the borders between realism and illusion, historical determinism and future-oriented reinventions, the abolitionist lectures of real life ex-slaves William and Ellen Craft adopted similar techniques to develop a more explicitly anti-slavery and anti-racist critique. In 1848,

the Crafts, married slaves who lived on separate plantations in Georgia, hatched an elaborate plan to escape from slavery. Ellen dressed up in men's clothing in order to pass for the white, male slave master and owner of William, who posed as her slave as the two made their way by train to Philadelphia. The story of their escape made the pair "an abolitionist *cause célèbre*," in the words of R. J. M. Blackett, but it also attracted the attention of their former masters, who sent slave-catchers to recapture the couple after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.[289] To preserve their freedom, the Crafts fled to England, where they remained for the next nineteen years.[290] Upon their arrival in England, they began traveling across Great Britain to present anti-slavery lectures with fellow fugitive and abolitionist William Wells Brown. In 1860, they published a narrative detailing their escape under the title *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*.

Though these lectures were designed to foment opposition to slavery and to raise money for the abolitionist cause, they also openly embraced a theatricality more often associated with popular entertainment than with politics. Daphne Brooks describes the remarkably savvy performance set that became a standard for Wells Brown and the Crafts in the years that followed: "The Wells Brown-Craft combination in Great Britain featured the display of Wells Brown's panorama and a variety of speeches. Brown and the Crafts 'had by now refined their pattern. First, Brown spoke against American slavery, then William described their escape and, finally, in a tear-jerking scene, Ellen was invited onstage.' Brown would occasionally 'sing a song or two' at gatherings before a collection was taken up for the abolitionist cause."[291] As Brooks notes, the "hyper-theatricality" of

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[289] R. J. M. Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 90.

[290] Ibid., 123.

[291] Brooks, "Introduction," *The Great Escapes: Four Slave Narratives* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2007) li. Brooks quotes from Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers*, 98, 102.

the abolitionist lecture is significant because it served in part to emphasize the agentive and creatively generative actions of the performing subject, displaying that subjecthood to a potentially skeptical public audience. Audrey Fisch posits that the impact of these lectures came in part from the power of African-American speakers on stage to unequivocally represent the horrors of the slave system not only through words, but through the display of the scarred and suffering black body.[292] The unconditional truth of the body that, in Brooks' formulation, works in melodrama to bolster an essentialist myth of racial purification, is repurposed by abolitionist lecturers to provide a testimony to the ravages of slavery that cannot be effaced or ignored. When the transparently expressive body familiar from the melodramatic stage is repurposed for the lecture platform, in other words, the truth that it speaks becomes radically different, serving to embody rather than elide the corporal reality of enslavement. The lectures of William and Ellen Craft, however, privilege a mode of bodily performance grounded not in the display of the flesh, but in its disguise. The result is that the Crafts' centered their opposition to slavery not around the suffering body but rather around the pleasures of artifice and artistry in which that body can participate outside the slavery system—pleasures which included forms of cross-racial play.[293] Thus the Crafts' pleasure, as Daphne Brooks argues, becomes part of their "performative resistance" to slavery and to minstrel performance culture.

Though the Crafts' story was narrated exclusively by William, on stage and in the text, the body of Ellen Craft stands at the center of their spoken and written performances. The Crafts'

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[292] Fisch notes that as abolitionist speakers lectured, they would often "reveal personal scars (Houston A. Baker has called these public displays of the physical markings of slavery the "Negro exhibit"), or display the instruments of torture used in slavery" (*American Slaves in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70). Similarly, in *Bodies in Dissent*, Brooks argues that black Atlantic abolitionists were "called on to exemplify the essential humanity of African Americans and to body forth the atrocities of the slave trade on a global stage" (67), wielding their bodies as a testament to the ravages of slavery.

[293] Brooks describes this pleasure as a "performative resistance" to the slavery system in her introduction to *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.

narratorial and onstage presentations work in a number of ways to mirror this act of disguise, overlaying and mediating Ellen's avowedly black body with voices, texts, and images that are meant to defamiliarize that body and trouble the audience's sense of racial perception. Though Ellen was recognized to be the "star" of the Crafts' performances and of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, it is not her voice that speaks the story of their daring escape, but that of her husband, who serves as both the authorial voice in the printed version and the sole speaker on stage during its performance.[294] William's narratorial voice not only mediates the audiences' access to Ellen, but also actively works to disguise her, participating in the performance of her passing. When, in the narrative, Ellen puts on her costume, William initiates a parallel narratorial costuming, cloaking Ellen in male referents: "We shook hands, said farewell, and started in different directions for the railway station. I took the nearest possible way to the train, for fear I should be recognized by some one, and got into the negro car in which I knew I should have to ride, but my *master* (as I will now call my wife) took a longer way round, and only arrived there with the bulk of the passengers. He obtained a ticket for himself and one for his slave to Savannah, the first port, which was about two miles off."[295] Craft continues the ruse for almost twenty pages, referring to his wife as his "master" and with male pronouns until they disembark in Philadelphia. Craft's narration highlights that his act of telling is also a performance, drawing attention to the ways in which Ellen's body not only engages in a dramatic act, but is mediated by the theatrical frames in which that act is embedded. Similarly, when Ellen came onstage at the narrative's conclusion, her body was juxtaposed to a "likeness" of herself dressed as a (white) man that was displayed on stage throughout the lecture. Though Ellen's feminine, corporeal presence was meant to attest to the "truth" of her narrative and her humanity, that truth was openly mediated by theatrical, narratorial, and visual disguises. These interlocking

[294] For a discussion of Ellen's stage performance, see Brooks, "Introduction," and Blackett.

[295] William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, *The Great Escapes: Four Slave Narratives*, ed. Daphne Brooks (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2007), 248. Hereafter cited in text.

visual and oral frames invited audiences to view Ellen Craft's body as a transient object that reflects several different racialized and gendered images at once, replicating the "racial phantasmagorias" Brooks describes. In doing so, the Crafts' performances intentionally disrupted the assumption that race could depend on the optical identification of transparently racialized bodies.

If the Crafts' lectures and their published narrative sought to defamiliarize racial categories, they did so in the service of anti-slavery testimony that complicates the relationship between "authentic" reportage and the artifice of fiction and the popular stage. Where earlier slave narratives utilized white frame narrators to authenticate ex-slaves' accounts of their slavery and escape, the Crafts utilize an explicitly theatrical frame to play the part of white authority and black fugitivity simultaneously, ironizing the conventions not only of racial spectatorship but also of the fugitive slave narrative, with its demands for sincerity, authenticity, and suffering—the hallmarks of a particular kind of reformist realism that would have been familiar to Victorian audiences. By presenting a form of anti-slavery testimony that juxtaposed its realist frame with openly theatrical displays of illusion, disguise, and racial impersonation that nevertheless remained ostensibly faithful to events as they had unfolded, the Crafts adapted minstrelsy's "frame and frame-break" aesthetic in order to challenge not only the racial stereotypes that minstrelsy cultivated, but also the relationship between realism and testimony. Bearing witness to the slavery system includes bearing witness to the theatrical means through which it orchestrated its terror, but also, more importantly, redirecting those theatrics towards a form of anti-slavery activism that might entice audiences who had grown accustomed to the spectacles of slavery's stages.

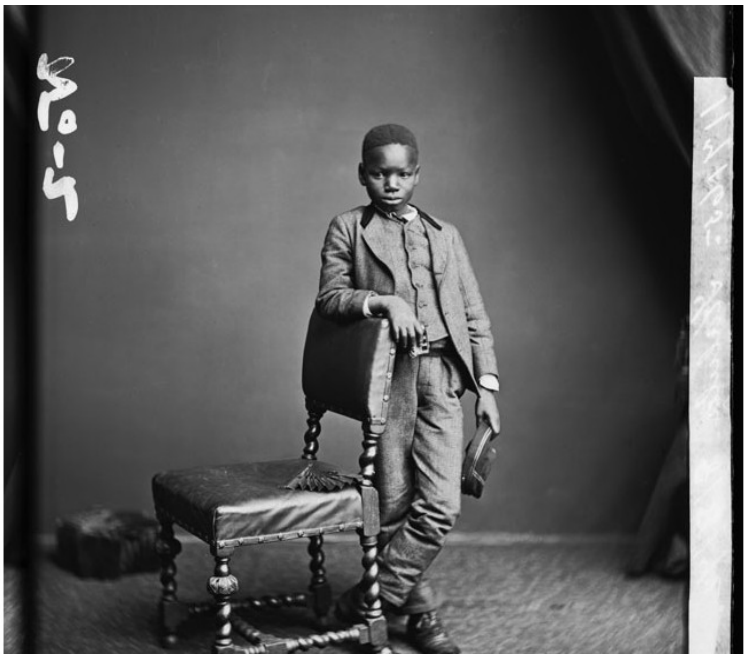
The Crafts offer a model of theatrical activism that indisputably adopted and transformed minstrelsy's cross-racial act for reformist purposes. Indeed, William Craft himself draws a direct connection for audiences between his performative labor and direct anti-slavery action. In *Running a Thousand Miles*, Crafts provides a melodramatic account of his sister's sale at a slave auction.

Following the sale, William watches her being driven away as he stands atop the auction platform: "On rising, I saw the cart in which she sat moving slowly off; and, as she clasped her hands with a grasp that indicated despair, and looked pitifully towards me, I also saw the large silent tears trickling down her cheeks. She made a farewell bow, and buried her face in her lap" (230). The suffering of Craft and his sister is not just rendered in the register of slave melodrama, but is also explicitly contextualized as such, as Craft notes, even amidst his sister's anguish, that she takes "a farewell bow." Though William has just described his powerlessness to help his sister, by relating her performance of suffering to the gestures of theater, he re-imagines the scene of objectification as one of intentional performance that highlights the way his sister's sale works on audiences in the present rather than the slave labor system to which her auction ostensibly belongs, and gestures towards the later performances William and Ellen would undertake to win their more decisive freedom from slavery. After recalling this story, Craft draws a direct line between his performative escape from slavery, its theatrical re-telling on stage and in text, and the terror that continues on slave plantations throughout the American South. Craft reports that his mother has since located his sister, and wrote to him to ask him to send money for her manumission and, he adds, "I am happy to say that, partly by lecturing occasionally, and through the sale of an engraving of my wife in the disguise in which she escaped, together with the extreme kindness and generosity of Miss Burdett Coutts, Mr. George Richardson of Plymouth, and a few other friends, I have nearly accomplished this" (230). In this vignette, the Crafts portray themselves as performers who have successfully transformed acting into a form of activism, to suggest that the shared thefts of slaves' bodies and black culture in minstrelsy performance could be disrupted through their performative repossessions that re-framed them as agents of their own transformation rather than the objects of racial possession on the lecture stage.

But while the Crafts' performances illustrate the effectiveness of discordant racial

performances for black artists, they leave open the question of how we ought to situate those performances in relation to Victorian racial spectatorship more broadly. The 2014 exhibition *Black Chronicles II*, staged by Autography ABP and devoted to "exploring black presences in 19th and early 20th-century Britain," perhaps best illustrates the interpretive challenges posed by experiments in Victorian minstrel culture.[296] Visitors entered the exhibition in the downstairs Project Gallery I, which featured a collection of images of the African Choir, taken in the 1890s, and of the Victorian explorer Henry Morton Stanley and his child servant Ndugu M'Hali, popularly known Kalulu, taken in the 1870s, that came from the London Stereoscope company and that had been reprinted from the original plates as large, strikingly modern black-and-white images, framed by quotations from cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Focusing almost exclusively on portraits of individual sitters, primarily members of the Choir, carefully composed and often looking directly into the camera, the downstairs Gallery invites visitors to celebrate the images as oppositional images that display their subjects' dignity, modernity, self-possession, and, at times, glamour, and that work against presumptions about the absence or invisibility of black Britons in the nineteenth century. In one particularly significant example, a tripartite collection of portraits of M'Hali staged the child's unstable performances of black British identity for the London Stereoscope's photographers. Positioned together in the gallery, a portrait on the left featured M'Hali in a Western suit posed against a backdrop of a mock-African wild, filled with plants and stones; a middle portrait featured M'Hali in the same suit in a domestic interior alongside a plain chair, with a fan laid on the chair and a hat in his hand; a portrait on the right featured M'Hali once again posed against the mock-African backdrop, this time wearing a patterned cloth draped, presumably in "native" style around his torso, but with suitpants and shoes visible underneath, with an open fan in hand.

[296] "Black Chronicles II," *Autograph ABP*, 2016, http://autograph-abp.co.uk/exhibitions/black-chronicles-ii.



COURTESY ISHMILTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES.

"Kalalu (Ndugu M'Hali), London Stereoscope Company, 8 August 1872"

Source: "Black Chronicles II," *CNN.com*, October 6, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/world/gallery/black-chronicles-ii/index.html.

Additional images can be accessed through: "Ndugu M'Hali Pictures and Images," *Getty Images*, http://www.gettyimages.com/photos/ndugu-m'hali, accessed April 22, 2016.

Presented without context, the images seem to present a set of frames—metropolitan and imperial, native and displaced, wild and domestic, real and costumed, natural and theatrical—that jar against one another across and within each image. Viewed from one angle, the images seem crafted around a set of droll juxtapositions that take M'Hali as the subject of satire—as an African who has traveled to Britain, M'Hali is an oddity, no longer at home in his "native" (and here openly counterfeited) African scene, but whose black skin insists that he can also never fully assimilate to or be naturalized within the Victorian parlor. Viewed from another angle, the images present a kind of non-linear narrative of a global black identity, as M'Hali plays with the costumes and poses of the European and African settings that he moves freely between. Upstairs, the exhibition's Project Gallery II featured a more heterogeneous array of nineteenth-century prints of single and multiple sitters from

a range of contexts, many unidentified, that included princes, servants, boxers, performers, clergymen, and authors, placing the reprinted images below in the context of the archive, which could seem fragmentary and limited but also evocative of a complicated and often capacious history of black life in the nineteenth century. Significantly, on display were the original rolls of the London Stereoscope's film from which some of the images in the downstairs Gallery I were taken; interspersed with the images on display downstairs, the film features children from the African Choir in grotesquely racist scenes that would be at home in the worst of the nineteenth-century's minstrel shows. Nearby, images from Henry Morton Stanley's later "African Exhibition," one of London's "human zoos," attested to his lifelong career of racist profiteering and exploitation—which included not only imperial expeditions in Africa and the human zoo, but also a brief stint fighting for the Confederacy in the American Civil War.[297] Placed in the context of the archive, it becomes difficult to imagine that Victorian audiences who saw the images of M'Hali could have separated them from prevailing racist and minstrel imagery, which would likely have treated his black body in a Victorian suit not as a sign of self-possession but as a kind of comedic, because failing, performance of whiteness—a kind of blackface performance in reverse.[298]

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[297] Felix Driver, "Stanley, Sir Henry Morton (1841–1904)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online edition, Sept 2013.

[298] Indeed, M'Hali, who became something of a celebrity in England before returning to South Africa for an expedition with Stanley, where he died in 1877, went on to perform as part of Stanley's lecture tours in what sounds strikingly like an imitation of the minstrel show's outlandish racial caricature. A reporter recalls that while discussing Stanley's lecture tour, "Kalalu was summoned, and, nothing loath, gave his war song and his accompanying wild dance, in their native, blood-curdling horror. In fact, he wanted to go on war dancing and war singing all day, and was with difficulty suppressed, after breaking most of the furniture, and was sent back to his boots." Shortly thereafter, M'Hali went on to repeat this act on stage, and was so popular that Stanley allegedly told his manager, "you'd better alter that advertisement. It runs now—'Lecture by Mr Stanley on South Africa, with War Dance and Song by his Native Boy, Kalalu, in the middle and again at the conclusion.' You had better have it changed to this, I think—' A South-African Concert by Kalalu, Mr H. M. Stanley's Black Boy, accompanied by War dances, with an Introduction and some Explanations by Mr Stanley.'" See: "Stanley the Explorer and His Audiences," *The Evening Telegraph*,

Ultimately, M'Hali's images and their place within the *Black Chronicles* exhibition offer a challenge to modern audiences faced with the artifacts of Victorian racial performance. Like the Crafts' performances, the exhibition explicitly asks its viewers to adopt a critical stance towards nineteenth-century anti-black racism, but it does so not by evading minstrel culture but by holding it in view. In the case of M'Hali's images, like the scenes from *The Half Caste* I discuss above, however, it is also difficult to separate their oppositional potential from the racist contexts that helped produce and frame their narrative. In order to view M'Hali's images as a performance of self-enjoyment or self-possession, audiences have to view the images within the context of imperial history while at the same time decoupling those images from the racism that likely motivated their original staging. By creating these kinds of spectatorial opportunities, the *Black Chronicles* exhibition thus asked viewers to engage with yet another juxtaposition, this time not between the real and the illusory, the acted and the authentic, but also between the present and the Victorian past. Reading these images accurately, the exhibition seems to suggest, requires us to look unblinkingly at racism's past while mining that past for signs of a different future—one that extends forward in time to the exhibition's present scene of encounter and beyond. This form of reading requires us to attend to the past, and also to find in that past a story it neither would nor could have told about itself—to practice, in other words, a form of historicism and a transhistorical act of imagination simultaneously, in order to see what those two modes of perception can reveal about one another. The exhibition neither rescues the past from its history nor consigns that history to the past, but instead offers a model for reading that embraces the past's open-ended experiments while helping audiences remember the ways in which that past also sought to foreclose those experiments and the different future they imagine. Rather than dismiss the affinities with the past that we seek in the present, the exhibition presents them as one more scene of productively discordant perception, this

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Dundee, Scotland, May 9, 1882, British Newspapers Database.

time between historical reality and the anti-historicist illusions of a less constrained, more generative past that, its organizers seem to suggest, we cannot help but look for when confronted with the past's artifacts.

In the next section, I will return to *Deronda* to argue that the novel joined these experiments in racial theater and presentation by exploring and, at times, adopting aesthetic and historically discordant methods similar to those found in these heterogeneous scenes of performance. Like Robertson, the Crafts, and the organizers of the *Black Chronicles* exhibition, Eliot turned to the popular tradition of racial performance in order to experiment with and at times critique slavery, its past, and its afterlives. But like those examples, the novel's results also ought to provoke, in modern audiences, ambivalence about the extent to which Victorian aesthetics truly resisted nineteenth-century racism. The novel thus offers an opportunity to consider not only the Victorian novel's response to slavery and its afterlives, but also the uses as well as the limitations of our own ambivalent relationship to Victorian Britain's racial past.

Performing the Slave Past in *Daniel Deronda*

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot revisits the conflicts between melodrama's dramas of possession, minstrelsy's acts of cultural theft, and experimental racial performances' attempt to wrest a practice of resistance from these competing cultural frames that I argue together comprised the nineteenth century's depictions of slavery and race on stage. Broadly speaking, these conflicts come to be embodied by the novel's competing heroines, Gwendolen Harleth and Mirah Lapidoth, who likewise embody two competing modes of appropriation. Where Gwendolen comes to represent the various forms of possession, repossession, and theft most closely associated with slavery's actual past, Mirah transforms her practice of appropriation into a mode of self-possession that keeps that past in view without turning it into another form of stolen cultural property.

If the Victorian novel often held in tension dyadic representations of slavery, divided

between the willful resistance and re-fettering of self-declared individualists and the willing slavery of family and socially-oriented subjects, Gwedolen Harleth's narrative re-imagines this duality as a form of contradiction embodied by the white, Victorian feminist. From the novel's opening chapters, Gwendolen imagines herself within a story of feminine fugitivity from the bondages of the marriage plot: "To be very much sued or hopelessly sighed for as a bride was indeed an indispensable part and agreeable guarantee of womanly power, but to become a wife and wear all the domestic fetters of that condition was on the whole a vexatious necessity" (39). Though she consents to marriage as a form of "social promotion," she describes her romantic progress as a willing capitulation to marriage's "fetters" that will nonetheless secure her future freedom: "Other people allowed themselves to be made slaves of, and to have their lives blown hither and thither like empty ships in which no will was present: it was not to be so with her, she would no longer be sacrificed to creatures worth less than herself, but would make the very best of the chances that life offered her and conquer circumstance by her exceptional cleverness" (39). More Lizzie Eustace than Jane Eyre, Gwendolen cynically embraces a vision of marriage as a form of role play in which she must play the part of the conquered slave in order to re-emerge as an individual capable of exercising her free will.

For Gwendolen, her claims to future independence derive, above all, from her imagined detachment from family life. Early in the novel, Eliot writes that "Gwendolen was as inwardly rebellious against the restraints of family conditions, and as ready to look through obligations into her own fundamental want of feeling for them, as if she had been sustained by the boldest speculations" (53). Eliot's narrator is quick to dismiss Gwendolen's desire for independence, arguing that for a character like Gwendolen, "a soul burning with a sense of what the universe is not, and ready to take all existence as fuel, is nevertheless held captive by the ordinary wire-work of social forms and does nothing particular" (53). But Gwendolen's attempts at female individualism are complicated not just by her attachment to social convention, but also by her at times excessive

attachment to the family she claims to rebel against. Though the narrator accuses Gwendolen of being selfish and cold, almost as soon as Gwendolen is faced with the real prospect of marriage, she develops what Eliot portrays as a painful attachment to and dependence on her mother. When Rex proposes to Gwendolen, for example, she declares to her mother that "I can't love people. I hate them" (82). Moments later, however, she claims a single exception: "putting her arms round her mother's neck with an almost painful clinging, she said brokenly, 'I can't bear any one to be very near me but you'" (82). Likewise, when Gwendolen and Grandcourt prepare to leave for Ryelands shortly after their marriage ceremony, Gwendolen insists to her mother that as she goes out into the world, she will be "always loving you better than anybody else in the world," dismissing her mother when she insists that she "will not be jealous if you love your husband better" (356). At the conclusion of the scene, once again, "the two feel into a clinging embrace" and Gwendolen sobs as she tells her mother, "I wish you were going with me" (356).

Gwendolen's sorrowful "clinging" to her mother stands out not only for the way in which it undermines her claims to familial detachment early in the novel, but also because so few of the Victorian novel's protagonists share Gwendolen's maternal attachments. Where the Victorian novel often focuses on the restoration or strengthening of familial bonds in the absence of mothers, Gwendolen's plot offers a rare instance of undiminished bonds of affection shared between mother and child—a bond that stands out all the more for the way in which the novel's other protagonist, Daniel, and its second heroine, Mirah, define themselves by the loss of their mothers throughout the novel. This bond casts an ironic shadow over the narrator's oft-quoted insistence that Gwendolen embodies a form of modern detachment: "Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it" (22). While Gwendolen may feel

unrooted from Offendene, her emotional life is thoroughly bound up in the family life the estate once housed. More importantly, Gwendolen's thorough (if reluctant) attachment to her mother stands in for the overweening attachments to the family that, as I have argued in previous chapters, helped define British whiteness and that helps distinguish it from the disruptions to family bonds inherent to the reproduction of blackness on both the slave plantation and in the slavery dramas I discussed above, where racial difference is often constituted less by skin color or stereotype than by characters' unique position simultaneously within and outside of the slaveholding family.

Thus while Gwendolen might feel herself detached from the English soil her family home sits upon, Eliot suggests that she is by no means detached from the inheritances of British whiteness. This national inheritance is reflected in the family wealth that has allowed Gwendolen to imagine herself as the ambitious, clever, social-climbing heroine of a late-Victorian novel. In the year leading up to the novel's action, we find Gwendolen comfortably appointed at a family mansion funded by wealth from the West Indies: "She had no notion how her maternal grandfather got the fortune inherited by his two daughters; but he had been a West Indian—which seemed to exclude further question" (24).[299] By stressing Gwendolen's ignorance of how this wealth was made, Eliot suggests the ways in which slavery's spoils linger long into the later nineteenth century, even as memories of its practice have become unspeakable. More importantly, when Eliot informs us in this same passage that "on the point of birth Gwendolen was quite easy" (24), she plays upon the ways in which this colonial wealth, the maternal genealogy that secures it, and the racial whiteness that genealogy works to produce together ensure a security in her own legitimacy that will turn out to constitutes a privilege exclusive to white Britons in the world of the novel.

While the story of Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt appears at first as a story about

[299] For a reading of colonial wealth in relation to Eliot and to the novel, see Nancy Henry, "George Eliot and the Colonies," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, no. 2 (2001): 413-433, as well as Doyle, *Freedom's Empire*, 351-3.

Gwendolen's thwarted attempts to sustain her freely detached position, it might be more accurate to say that in marrying Grandcourt, Gwendolen seeks to re-secure her attachments to both her mother and to the white femininity those maternal bonds shore up, attachments that are imperiled by the loss of her colonial fortune.[300] Following her engagement, Gwendolen attempts to suggest that her acceptance of his proposal was motivated in part by Grandcourt's promises to support her mother, "a part of the love-making which Gwendolen had remembered to cite to her mother with perfect accuracy" (309). Eliot portrays this motive as a mere self-justification for Gwendolen's decision to accept a proposal she knows she ought to have declined, but that motive is of a part with Gwendolen's more pervasive desire to regain the sense of self-possession that her lost inheritance has disturbed. Faced with the threat of work, as a governess or on stage, Gwendolen finds in marriage an opportunity to restore the illusion of a comfort without labor that her West Indian fortune represented. The notion that Gwendolen's marriage will restore her status as legitimate British heroine safely ensconced within the family rather than thrust outside of it into the world of work or publicity is likewise thrown into relief by the specter of Lydia Glasher, whose presence in the novel ensures that Gwendolen's legitimacy will come at the cost of legitimacy for Lydia and her children.

Situating Gwendolen's plot in relation to her history of familial attachment and colonial inheritances places the story about marital slavery she tells herself in an ironic perspective. Rather than take up the lineage of the pained individualist previously embodied by characters such as Edith Dombey and Lucy Snowe, Gwendolen presents us with a character who imagines herself that way, only for the narrative itself to suggest that she might share a closer kinship with characters such as Paul Dombey and Paulina Home who were most bound up in the excessive, and therefore binding,

[300] Later in the novel, Eliot writes, "It appears that the Caribs, who know little of theology, regard thieving as a practice peculiarly connected with Christian tenets, and probably they could allege experimental grounds for this opinion" (206).

emotional life of the British family. Indeed, Eliot herself at times portrays Gwendolen as another example of the "willing slave," whose performances of will occur within the confines of willing bondage to others. When Grandcourt is first introduced, for example, Eliot describes Gwendolen's enjoyment of his attention as akin to what Eliot describes as the "mythical" pleasures of a slave on an auction block: "No wonder she enjoyed her existence on that July day. Pre-eminence is sweet to those who love it, even under mediocre circumstances: perhaps it is not quite mythical that a slave has been proud to be bought first" (100).[301] More often, however, the familial history and emotional attachments underwriting Gwendolen's narrative work implicitly to underscore the contradictions inherent to her self-image as a radically independent subject caught up as a "slave" in her marriage to Grandcourt.

These twin interpretations of Gwendolen's marriage—as a form of binding attachment she has willed for herself to strengthen and replace the attachments her poverty imperils, and as a form of fettering she has sought to escape from the first moments of the novel—collide in the novel's later scenes that probe Gwendolen's burgeoning sense of her own conscience. When Gwendolen is taken on board Grandcourt's yacht, Eliot does not shy away from suggesting that Gwendolen is engaged in a re-enactment of the slave ship's passage. The scene is initially framed from Grandcourt's perspective, and stresses his determination to re-possess Gwendolen after her meetings with Deronda, in order to "feel more securely that she was his to do as he liked with" (668), a possession he justifies by recourse to the marriage contract. Grandcourt, we are told, "might have pleaded that he was perfectly justified in taking care that his wife should fulfill the obligations she had accepted. Her marriage was a contract where all the ostensible advantages were on her side…he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her, and these she had got: he had

[301] Eliot concludes with the caveat, "But for complete enjoyment the outward and the inward must concur. And that concurrence was happening to Gwendolen" (100). But the unhappy marriage between Grandcourt and Gwendolen that follows suggests that Gwendolen's circumstances might be similarly inauspicious, despite the narrator's suggestion otherwise.

fulfilled his side of the contract" (669). Interestingly, however, when the scene re-focalizes itself around Gwendolen's perspective, the narrative shifts to detailing the ways in which Gwendolen struggles to come to terms not with Grandcourt's claims to possession but rather with the conflict between her sense of obligation to herself, her family, and to Grandcourt and her newfound appreciation for the ways in which justice demands an obligation to more distant parties. Gwendolen acknowledges that,

> She could not excuse herself by saying that there had been a tacit part of the contract on her side—namely, that she meant to rule and have her own way. With all her early indulgence in the disposition to dominate, she was not one of the narrow-brained women who through life regard all their own selfish demands as rights, and every claim upon them as injury. She had a root of conscience in her, and the process of purgatory had begun for her on the green earth: she knew she had been wrong. (669)

Gwendolen is pained in this scene less by Grandcourt's bare-faced display of domination or the "injury" that domination has done to her than by her lingering sense of responsibility to Lydia Glasher that shifts the focus of the passage away from the ways in which Gwendolen has been wronged to the wrong she feels she has committed. This pain marks an important turning point not only for Gwendolen's character, but also for the Victorian novel's contest over the "willing slavery" of English wives. For in the meditations that follow, Eliot recruits the trope of willing slavery as a metaphor for the ways in which British attachments to family and wealth alike have enabled English subjects to refuse their obligations to those beyond the bounds of these personal attachments. Eliot directly invites readers to imagine their way into Gwendolen's conflicted self-consciousness:

> But now enter into the soul of this young creature as she found herself, with the blue Mediterranean dividing her from the world, on the tiny plank-island of a yacht, the domain of the husband to whom she felt that she had sold herself, and had been paid the strictest price—nay, paid more than she had dared to ask in the handsome maintenance of her mother: —the husband to whom she had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he held them throttled into silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would, without remonstrance. (669)

Formally, the passage embodies the narrator's ambivalent position with respect to Gwendolen's self-consciousness. Readers are invited to "enter into the soul" of Gwendolen, as the narrator promises

to bypass not only Gwendolen's outward appearances but even her mind in conversation with itself to the "soul" that lies beneath conscious thought. And yet at this moment of radical interiority, the narrator herself reasserts her distance from Gwendolen's perceptions: Gwendolen "felt that she had sold herself," but whether the narrator endorses the metaphor or wants to maintain her distance from it by attributing it to Gwendolen remains to be seen. In the description that follows, Gwendolen imagines herself as another example of the "willing slave" who has "sold herself" into captivity, in exchange for ensuring, among other forms of wealth, the "maintenance" of the mother to whom she has discovered a painful attachment over the course of the novel. But by the end of the passage, the narrator seems to suggest that what Gwendolen mourns is not the loss of the self—the "selfish demands" that she dismisses earlier in the passage—but rather "her truthfulness and sense of justice" (669), which she first sacrificed when she reneged on her promises to Lydia.

This passage encapsulate the ironies that surround not only Gwendolen but also the plot of willing slavery in Eliot's novel. At this crucial moment, we are invited to take seriously the idea that Gwendolen repents having sacrificed her obligations to Lydia, who has remained largely distant from Gwendolen's social world, in exchange not only for the wealth and status Lydia's poisonous diamonds advertise, but also for his care for her mother—a care that ends up largely severing their social bond even as it maintains their economic ties. And yet Gwendolen's desire to supplant the demands of the self for a more selfless form of justice comes wrapped in a language of willing slavery that appropriates both slavery's history and its melodramatic reimagining's (most notably in Gwendolen's similarities to Zoe's heroic will to slavery) in order to secure our investment in Gwendolen's emotional life in the midst of the novel's increased attention to the "Jewish plot" in its second half. Indeed, Eliot herself invites readers to consider the ironies of Gwendolen's self-declared slavery later in the scene. Immediately after her Gwendolen declares that she has "sold herself," the narrator (ambiguously focalizing Gwendolen's own perspective) asks, "What had she to

complain of? The yacht was of the prettiest; the cabin fitted up to perfection, smelling of cedar, soft-cushioned, hung with silk, expanded with mirrors" (670). If readers are tempted to imagine Gwendolen on board a slave ship, the narrative quickly interrupts this act of readerly projection with a detailed description of the yacht's comforts: its handsome crew, the amusements of sailing, and the dazzling weather. More to the point, days later, as Gwendolen broods in silence, "Grandcourt put up his telescope and said, 'There's a plantation of sugar-canes at the foot of that rock: should you like to look?'" to which Gwendolen responds half-heartedly, "'Yes, please,' remembering that she must try and interest herself in sugar-canes as something outside her personal affairs" (672).

Ultimately, these ironies gesture towards the legacy of British whiteness that enables Gwendolen's narrative trajectory. That Gwendolen began the narrative as its legitimate heroine, could claim her position as legitimate wife, could reformulate that legitimacy as a mode of slavery, and finally could find herself wrestling with the conflict between self-justification and selfless justice as a matter of metaphorical abstraction are all tied, in this scene, to the history of slavery that the scene alternately re-enacts, ironizes, and then calls back to in the different, historically concrete form of the sugar plantation. Eliot draws a direct connection between Gwendolen's willingness to imagine herself as caught up in a form of self-willed slavery and the economic and social power that slavery's literal history has granted her. In doing so, she invites a critique of the way in which Gwendolen, following on a long tradition of Victorian novel heroines, seeks to condense the interlocking stories of heterosexual exchange and colonial slavery into the singular figure of the English wife, who nonetheless enjoys the material and political benefits slavery helped create for white Britons.

In her reading of this scene, Doyle argues that Gwendolen's discourse of slavery reveals that "she learns, in Hegelian struggle, that 'the desire to conquer is itself a sort of subjection,'"[302] and that "her position as [Grandcourt's] wife is within empire, as witness to crime. Her contract is with this

[302] Doyle, *Freedom's Empire*, 355.

imperial economy."[303] In this description, Doyle to some extent reinvigorates the paradox of willing slavery, which recasts women's will as a form of self-subjection that sanctions their metaphorical invocations of "slavery." But what is most significant about this scene is not only Gwendolen's realization that her desire for marital conquest and the defeat of that desire has tied her to the imperial system, but also the way in which this scene destabilizes both Gwendolen's and readers' own relationship to these revelations, raising the question of how readers should respond to Gwendolen's use of slavery as a metaphor. Within the frame of Gwendolen's narrative, slavery offers a language of feminist critique, but one that the larger frame of racial injustice, indexed as much by the sugar plantation Gwendolen drifts past as by the novel's Jewish plot, ironizes and so makes visible as a form of appropriation. This doubled narrative structure, which asks us to see Gwendolen as both akin to and distinct from the female slave, resembles the doubled dramatic structure of the slavery melodrama, in which marriage and slavery become performances of one another. But by ironizing the relationship between marriage and slavery, Eliot's novel seems to offer a new challenge to its readers: can we imagine an alliance between feminism and slavery that could resist absorbing the slave past into another possession of white Victorian femininity?

In order to re-orient the relationship between novelistic heroine and slavery's history, Eliot, I argue, must turn away from the unhappy English wife towards the novel's Jewish heroine, Mirah Lapidoth, and the more experimental performances of slavery and its afterlife that her character introduces into the novel. These performances re-tell the history of slavery outside of the slavery-marriage nexus that had defined that history as it had so often appeared in Victorian fiction. To do so, Mirah's performances offer an aesthetic of cross-racial identification that competes with and responds to Gwendolen's more straightforward appropriations of the conventions of slavery melodramas and of Mirah's own story. By recasting the story of willed resistance and willing

[303] Ibid., 356.

subjection Gwendolen's narrative unfolds as a series of knowing performances of slavery's history within the novel, Mirah's narrative brings the frame-breaking aesthetic of the era's experimental racial performances to *Daniel Deronda*, where it upends the linear progress from the criminally cross-racial colonial past to a racially pure, imperial future in favor of a different way of perceiving both slavery's history and the Atlantic racial formations that history helped bring about.

Where Gwendolen's interactions with slavery's legacy are largely confined to the depths of her self-conscious interiority, Mirah engages in a series of performances that stage racial subjection and its resistance for the novel's characters and its readers. These novelistic performances diverge from both Gwendolen's interiorized metaphors and the stage melodrama's live performances, however. Because Mirah's performances are staged within the bounds of narrative, they represent, I argue, a kind of hybridization of narrative and theater that extends the period's experiments in racial performance in new ways. As Mirah at times mimics African-American characters such as Zoe and Oscar Cabrera and real life activists such as the Crafts, Eliot transforms Mirah's story of suffering and reclaimed ethnic identity into an act of racial impersonation more familiar from minstrelsy acts. And yet, the fact that Mirah's performance is mediated by text, and that her racial performance occurs in word but not in body, allows the text to incorporate and hybridize voices and discourses in a way that live bodies seemingly cannot, producing a work that can move between and through historical frames and racial characterizations rather than collapsing them into the racial stereotyping and cultural theft of the minstrel stage. By allowing readers to view Mirah through the overlapping, discordant frames of English, Jewish, and African American history, Eliot turns the "frame-break" aesthetics of minstrelsy into scenes of cultural interchange that more closely resemble what Tavia Nyongó, drawing on the work of José Muñoz, calls "a disidentification," a form of cross-cultural affiliation that strengthens identity even as it decenters it. "Rather than accept the identity one is granted within the symbolic order, or fleeing it into a space of nonidentity," Nyongó writes,

"disidentity works on and through identity, enacting perverse and unexpected affiliations."[304] For Nyongó, it is disidentification, rather than the desire to co-opt whiteness, that drives, for example, Frederick Douglass's open affinity for the Scottish Romanticism of Robert Burns. In contrast to critics who have read this affinity as a simple reversal of minstrel culture's "black-white framework," Nyongó argues that this act of disidentification and others like it provided "a hostile weapon against both abstract liberalism and racial particularism."[305] By entering into this openly performative cultural milieu, Eliot's Mirah likewise interrogates her attachments to her specifically Jewish ethnicity and the dimensions of her personal, familial, and social history through her performed affinity with histories of slavery, antislavery resistance, and its performativity that belong to African American culture. Rather than dissolve ethnic particularity into the performative "interchangeability" Kurnick describes, however, these performances are notable for the way in which they maintain and ultimately enable Mirah's attachments to Jewish particularity, albeit reconfigured as a more capacious form of particularity, because more densely networked with other cultures and with the history of the black Atlantic in particular. Mirah's character, in other words, represents the complexities that inhere in seeking out forms of self-possession that escape the logic of cultural theft and willful appropriation, assimilation, or ethnic separatism that would seem to constrain Victorian conceptions of race and ethnicity.

After Mirah's initial suicide attempt is averted by Deronda, she is brought to the Meyricks, where she precedes to narrate her life story. Mirah's story, interestingly, stands out as one of the few moments in the course of the novel in which a character's back-story is narrated in dialogue by the character herself, rather than by the novel's overbearing narrator, underscoring that this history constitutes a public performance. In the extended and virtually uninterrupted scene that takes place

[304] Nyongó, *The Amalgamation Waltz*, 131.

[305] Ibid., 132.

at the Meyrick's, Mirah's story comes to bear an uncanny resemblance to slavery's progress from the Atlantic middle passage to the plantation's theaters of terror to the fugitive narrative, albeit condensed into the space of a few years in Mirah's life. Mirah's story of subjection begins with her separation from her mother and brother and with a voyage onboard a ship headed for America—a forced exile that recalls both slavery's originary displacement and its ongoing practices of familial disruption and dispersion:

> It is dreadful to speak of, yet I must tell you — I must tell you everything. My father — it was he who took me away….we went on board a ship, and got farther and farther away from the land. Then I was ill; and I thought it would never end — it was the first misery, and it seemed endless. But at last we landed. I knew nothing then, and believed what my father said. But it was America we had reached, and it was long years before we came back to Europe. (211-2)

From here, her narration moves through a number of conventional aspects of nineteenth-century accounts of slave life, with their attendant stresses on the hardship of family separation, the day to day experience of terrors known and unknown, forced labor, and, for women, the impending threat of sexual coercion—a threat that comes to precipitate the major crisis in Mirah's early life. The vivid evocation of this unspeakable and yet normalized violation presents perhaps the strongest link between Mirah's life and accounts of the lives of slave women that circulated both on stage and in print. As Mirah's father enters into a "conspiracy" with a Count to give his daughter away in exchange for the release of his debts, Mirah explains:

> I now began to feel a horrible dread of this man, for he worried me with his attentions, his eyes were always on me: I felt sure that whatever else there might be in his mind towards me, below it all there was scorn for the Jewess and the actress. And when he came to me the next day in the theatre and would put my shawl round me, a terror took hold of me; I saw that my father wanted me to look pleased…he smiled at me, and his smile went through me with horror. (218)

From here, Mirah's narrative follows a number of the conventions of the fugitive slave's escape, including a long and arduous journey by train and by foot across several states, a constant anxiety of recognition and exposure, and even references to the newspaper advertisements through which

pursuits and returns to captivity were so often effectuated, the thought of which, Eliot tells us, "roused the poor child's terror: she was convinced that her father would see it—he saw everything in the papers" (223). Even after Mirah successfully makes her way to "freedom," the threat of capture and return lingers on; after almost a year has passed within the novel, we still find that "'If he should come and find us!' was a thought which to Mirah sometimes made the street daylight as shadowy as a haunted forest where each turn screened for her an imaginary apparition" (619).

While Mirah's account of her early life mirrors the descriptions of slave life found in contemporaneous fugitive narratives and melodramas, that account also includes what at first seems an important distinction, for the coerced work that she performs occurs not at home or in the fields, but on the popular stage. But Mirah's description of her life at the Coburg could also be read as representing with surprising pointedness and clarity the relationship between violent coercion and theatrical performance that Saidiya Hartman has shown to be endemic to the nineteenth-century slave system in America. In Mirah's explanation, the "theater" becomes a site not of amusement but of forced hard labor: "I worked quite hard, though I was so little; and I was not nine when I first went on the stage. I could easily learn things, and I was not afraid. But then and ever since I hated our way of life" (212-3). What Mirah detests, however, is not so much the labor of acting as the crude enjoyment that those around her seem to gain from it—an enjoyment that seems to come in part from the pain that it serves to exacerbate:

> always there were men and women coming and going, there was loud laughing and disputing, strutting, snapping of fingers, jeering, faces I did not like to look at—though many petted and caressed me…My father began to believe that I might be a great singer: my voice was considered wonderful for a child; and he had the best teaching for me. But it was painful that he boasted of me, and set me to sing for show at any minute, as if I had been a musical box…the clapping and all the sounds of the theatre were hateful to me; and I never liked the praise I had, because it seemed all very hard and unloving." (213)

Transformed into a "musical box"—a mechanical instrument and object whose sole purpose is to provide entertainment—Mirah's domination is enacted not through grotesque violence, but through

the enjoyment of those around her, whose harassing spectatorship ("snapping" and "jeering") slides into the physical assault of "petting" and "caressing" that lurks in the despicable guise of seduction and sensual pleasure. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman argues that slave performances onstage and off "outline a problematic of enjoyment in which pleasure is inseparable from subjection."[306] In Mirah's recollection, the work of performing as a Jewess on the American stage seems to belong to the same world of American racial terror. Indeed, as Mirah grows older, the distinction between "theater" and "real-life" spectacle begins to fade, making theatrical performance all the more painful. As Mirah concludes the first act of her story, she explains:

> ever since I was carried away from my mother I had felt myself a lost child taken up and used by strangers, who did not care what my life was to me, but only what I could do for them. It seemed all a weary wandering and heart-loneliness—as if I had been forced to go to merry-making without the expectation of joy. (222)

For Mirah, not just the stage, but daily life itself becomes a coercive performance of outer "merry-making" that exacerbates her inner suffering even as it masks it. Mirah's earlier experiences thus come to reflect the ways in which performance and terror can work together to disrupt the coherence of the self, gesturing towards an American slavery system built upon the power of these "scenes of subjection" to efface the subjectivity of the racial other.

But while these early scenes pointedly tie Mirah to the American slavery system, they keep in view the theatricality of Mirah's suffering—a theatricality that draws readers' attention to the performative nature of Mirah's own identification with that system. In these early scenes, it is not only Mirah's status as Jewess or captive daughter that binds her to slavery, but also the performance culture she has been forced to labor within. But those same performances invite readers of the novel to see Mirah as an actress playing the role of the fugitive slave as much as a Jewish woman bearing witness to her personal trauma, leading readers into a kind of interpretive double-bind, as we move between placing Mirah within realist and self-consciously non-real theatrical frames, between an

[306] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 33.

identification with slavery and a performative distance from it.

As the novel progresses, however, this indeterminacy becomes a crucial facet of the way Mirah knowingly constitutes her Jewish identity through performance, as the meaning of Mirah's theatrical labor shifts away from the coercion that marks her earliest experiences towards a form of theatrical work that holds out the promise of economic and artistic self-determination. Soon after Mirah's first appearance in the novel, Deronda asks that she sing for him. At first, the narrator reports that though Mirah agrees to sing, "Perhaps her ease of manner was due to something more than the simplicity of her nature. The circumstances of her life had made her think of everything she did as work demanded from her, in which affectation had nothing to do; and she had begun her work before self-consciousness was born" (372). We find Mirah, then, caught between her habituated attitude towards performance as a kind of mandated work, and her newfound possession of a "self-consciousness" that might begin to make that performance pleasurable. The scene turns out to be a transitional one. At the conclusion of her performance, Mirah tells Daniel that her singing formerly "has been a great pain to me, because it failed in what it was wanted for. But now we think I can use it to get my bread" (373). For the first time, Mirah becomes the exclusive proprietor of her staged labor, and the result is a movement towards a different kind of performance marked not by subjection but by self-invention and, perhaps even more importantly, sustenance. As Mirah reflects on the money she might make from her performance, Deronda notes that she "smiled with a touch of merriment he had not seen in her before" (373). The reason, we discover, is that Mirah has already begun to plan ahead for when she and her mother are reunited: "I daresay I should find her poor—I mean my mother. I should want to get money for her. And I cannot always live on charity" (373). Like the Crafts, Mirah plans to use her theatrical performances to reunite with and free the family member she had had to leave behind long ago, aligning her decision to re-enter the stage with the kinds of personal and political activism exemplified by abolitionist lecturers who

came before her. Indeed, we are told soon thereafter that "She went on willingly" with her singing, suggesting that her performances have become not just consensual but self-willed, asserting an economic independence that is, perhaps surprisingly, central to her changing conception of the possibilities that the theater offers her.

These later performances align Mirah with the abolition activists who turned to the stage as a source of self-expression, antislavery advocacy, and economic sustenance, but they also conclude with Mirah's abandonment of the slave narrative in favor of resuming with renewed force the role of the theatrical Jewess. As Mirah prepares for her first semi-public concert following her escape, she and the Meyricks fall into a discussion of how she should dress for the stage. While Mrs. Meyrick suggests a new dress for Mirah, she claims, "I don't want anything better than this black merino" (487). The reason is not natural modesty but rather her understanding that the dress serves as a suitable costume for the role that it would most profit her to play: "'This would be thought a very good stage-dress for me,' she said pleadingly, 'in a part where I was to come on as a poor Jewess and sing to fashionable Christians'" (488). In response, Hans tries to "neutralise" Mirah's Jewishness, to which she responds, "But it is what I am really. I am not pretending anything" (488), a line that is often quoted in support of Mirah's putative antitheatricality and her embodiment of an essential form of Jewish ethnicity. But as we have seen, Mirah's attachment to what Hans calls the "*rôle* of the poor Jewess" only comes about through her disidentification with a history of slavery and racial terror that she identifies with and yet remains theatrically distanced from. Mirah's embrace of a theatricalized Jewishness underscores the opportunities for self-enjoyment and self-proprietorial labor that an explicitly racialized mode of performance offers her later in the novel. At the same time, the scene also reminds us that each of Mirah's stories of suffering are threaded through with her training as a performer, training that explicitly troubles the borders between reality and theater. These scenes cast a knowing irony over Mirah's earlier performances of suffering and slavery,

suggesting that perhaps they were not so distinct from her later self-consciously theatrical performance of Jewishness in the second half of the novel. More importantly, these later performances reveal that theatricality and performative disidentifications can work together to reorient characters' attachments to racial histories, turning those attachments into a form of vividly theatrical memorialization marked by pleasure and play without erasing historical traumas.

In this way, Mirah's performances rework not only the formation of racial or ethnic identity within the novel, but also the relationship between slavery, its British history, and female will that was central to novels that interrogated Victorian feminism. In doing so, they reframe the discourse of slavery adopted by Gwendolen and Daniel's mother, Leonora, the novel's traditional female individualists. Like Gwendolen, Leonora describes the condition of women as a form of slavery to the demands of heterosexual exchange. Describing her father, she insists "such men turn their wives and daughters into slaves" (631); under these conditions, her flight into the world of the theater, she insists, ought to be read as a resistance to female entrapment. Where Gwendolen forsakes the stage for marriage, Leonora insists that her status as an actress has at least saved her from becoming a "willing slave": "I am not a loving woman…Others have loved me—and I have acted their love. I know very well what love makes of men and women—it is subjection. It takes another for a larger self, enclosing this one….I was never willingly subject to any man" (666). For Leonora, free will, embodied by a woman's right to act on stage, requires that she free herself from social and cultural attachments.[307] By contrast, Mirah implicitly eschews the models of detached freedom Gwendolen and Leonora embrace in favor of a willing attachment both to family history and ethnic identity. We might read Mirah, then, as a version of the Victorian novel heroine whose will finds expression in willing submission to social obligations and familial attachments. But I want to argue that in her theatricalization of those attachments, which seem marked by self-enjoyment and self-assertion

[307] Amanda Anderson makes this point in her reading of Leonora in *The Powers of Distance*, 138-143.

more than submission to social convention or the whims of her fellow characters, Mirah reworks the role of the willing slave into a knowingly ironic performance of female artistry and self-determination that gains its force from its connection to rather than freedom from the intertwined histories of Jewish stigma and Atlantic slavery the novel imagines. Mirah's "modern," and explicitly racialized, self-identity depends, in other words, on her willingness to return to and re-embody the slave past. Rather than a break from history, then, Eliot imagines a version of modern self-possession defined by its ability to keep multiple pasts—British, Jewish, West Indian, and African American—present as the grounds of a particularist ethnic identity.

Even as Mirah's performances remain attached to the past, they thus play upon that past by situating it in relation to a dense network of overlapping, and constantly shifting, temporal and cultural frames, as the novel looks to the British West Indies, the American Civil War, *Othello*, *Ivanhoe*, Greek mythology, modern melodrama, and much more to craft a kind of pastiche aesthetic, equal parts historical and modern, realist and illusory. This method of course is of a part with the Victorian novel's essential heteroglossia, but in *Deronda*, Eliot also emphasizes its theatrical dimensions in order to give these frames a kind of living quality, as if they form the set for live performance as much as the discursive medium for textual narrative. The novel's performative quality is reflected in the way that Gwendolen and Mirah themselves replay scenes staged in earlier chapters. First Gwendolen and then Mirah enter the novel through Daniel's line of sight; each are received by him when they were on the midst of drowning (Mirah when she first enters the novel, Gwendolen after she has jumped into the water after Grandcourt); as readers, we watch first Gwendolen and then Mirah audition for Klesmer and "auctioned" on the marriage market. Most importantly, in the scenes I've discussed above, we watch Gwendolen recreate Mirah's slave voyage at sea. Taken together, these repeated scenes give Gwendolen and Mirah's actions the quality of a performance that features different actresses in the same role, reanimating the conjoined

performances of slavery and marriage central to the slavery melodrama. But the effect of these repetitions have distinct consequences for the novel's British and Jewish plots. Gwendolen's re-performance of Mirah's story of captivity and fugitivity comes to seem merely parodic—Gwendolen imitates an imitation of slavery, and she does so often without attention to its history or modern afterlives. Though her life has been shaped by slavery's history, her uses of that history come to seem largely appropriative, until she is finally forced to wrestle with their ethical implications in limited ways as the novel nears its conclusion.

By contrast, Mirah's performances help attach the conventions of the British novel to the patchwork of theatrical, historical, and cultural frames that her performances move between.[308] Mirah's performances make visible the terror of the slavery system, the pleasures of resistance to that system, and, at the same time, her own merely theatrical relationship to these experiences. These performances thus invite readers to encounter the slave past re-animated by one of the novel's characters without losing sight of the gaps between that performance and the fact that slavery, in reality, has unfolded elsewhere in space and time. This mode of disidentification allows slavery to enter the novel without absorbing it into mere metaphor. Indeed, by not merely discursively appropriating but actively re-enacting the slave past and the world of racial performance to which

[308] Late in the novel, Eliot reveals that Mirah's theatrical training has helped her understand—and despise—the social role that Gwendolen plays: "Her peculiar life and education had produced in her an extraordinary mixture of unworldliness, with knowledge of the world's evil, and even this knowledge was a strange blending of direct observation with the effects of reading and theatrical study. Her memory was furnished with abundant passionate situation and intrigue, which she never made emotionally her own, but felt repelled aloofness from, as she had done from the actual life around her. Some of that imaginative knowledge began now to weave itself around Mrs. Grandcourt; and though Mirah would admit no position likely to affect her reverence for Deronda, she could not avoid a new painfully vivid association of his general life with a world away from her own, where there might be some involvement of his feeling and action with a woman like Gwendolen, who was increasingly repugnant to her" (652-3). Mirah and Gwendolen are no Dorothea and Rosamund. But what is interesting to note about this passage is that despite Eliot's protestations that Mirah has formed no emotional connection with the theatrical roles she has played, she nonetheless reveals that Mirah knows what Gwendolen is because she has studied her part and perhaps even taken part in its stage performance. If Mirah plays the role of the slave and the Jewess, she is also familiar with the role of the society heroine.

that past is tied, Mirah's performances portray slavery's afterlife as an ongoing process that is part of the live world of the novel, rather than merely a specter of a distant past.

Mirah's performances thus offer a model for a new mode of reading the legacy of slavery and the formation of race within the novel. In order to appreciate those performances, readers of the novel must learn to apprehend Mirah as a figure framed by multiple forms of racialization, multiple histories, and multiple aesthetics, who herself relates to those competing frames with a range of affective attitudes—sincere sorrow, nostalgia, self-enjoyment, and perhaps even self-aware irony. This mode of reading calls back to, and seeks to transform, the forms of racial discernment, and the tonal variability, of more appropriative forms of racial performance, beginning with Daniel's own phantasmagoric perception of Mirah as a two-toned "cameo" and a figure ambiguously drawn from *Othello* in their first encounter on the banks of the Thames. Later in the novel, Daniel again encounters Mirah as a kind of "cameo," caught between black and white. As he listens to her sing, Eliot's narrator walks us through Daniel's vision: "Imagine her—it is always good to imagine a human creature in whom bodily loveliness seems as properly one with the entire being as the bodily loveliness of those wondrous transparent orbs of life that we find in the sea…see the perfect cameo her profile makes, cut in a duskish shell where by some happy fortune there pierced a gem-like darkness for the eye and eyebrow; the delicate nostrils defined enough to be read for sensitive movements, the finished ear, the firm curves of the chin and neck entering into the expression of refinement which was not feebleness" (372). Daniel's vision vacillates between the transparency of the orb and the opacity of the seashell, the dark and light shades called up by the "duskish shell" and "gem-like darkness," and the temporality of present scene and Mirah's past, watery entrance into the novel. This visualization thus offers in miniature a version of the discordantly racialized aesthetics Mirah plays into and plays upon throughout the novel, transporting the illusions of the minstrel and melodramatic stage to the novel's pages. But where Daniel struggles to place Mirah within racial and

temporal schema, Eliot's own act of narrative "phantasmagoria," masquerading as realist description, invites her readers to engage in a more flexible form of reading that takes pleasure in the proliferation of visual, metaphorical, and temporal frames, rather than attempting to affix Mirah within a particular ethnic or temporal context.

In this way, Mirah's performances work not only against minstrel and melodramatic conventions, but also against the future conclusion of the novel's plot, in which the heterogeneous mixture of affiliations and disidentifications that characterized Mirah's story are brought to their firmly separatist, and infamously imperialist, conclusion, as the novel's Jewish characters leave England for Palestine. Rather than focus on the conclusion of the novel's plot, however, I want to conclude by suggesting that Eliot's novel at the same time calls forward to a different, contemporary present, and the reimaginings of race and temporality found there.

In his 2012 series *An Economy of Grace*, painter Kehinde Wiley produced his first series of portraits of African American women, whom he posed in scenes based on "historical portraits of society women," primarily produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[309] Placing African American women squarely within a set of historical and social frames—the society portrait, the Western art canon, the couture gown, and Wiley's own oeuvre—from which they have historically been excluded, the portraits are intended, in Wiley's own words, to reinforce a "sense of belongingness" at odds with a history that dictated that "these people are not supposed to be there."[310] While the portraits draw inspiration from a range of portrait artists and periods, it is worth noticing that a distinctively nineteenth-century aesthetic runs through many of the portraits, from the modernized Regency gowns the models pose in to the William Morris floral designs that Wiley borrowed for some of their backgrounds, and culminating in "Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-

[309] "An Economy of Grace," *Kehinde Wiley Studio*, http://kehindewiley.com/works/an-economy-of-grace/.

[310] *Kehinde Wiley: An Economy of Grace*, directed by Jeff Dupre (Show of Force and PBS, 2014), DVD.

Gotha," Wiley's reimagining of Landseer's 1839 portrait of Queen Victoria's cousin that features an African American model posing within the Princess's frame. In Naomi Beckwith's notes on the image, she writes that "the model's lovely back in Wiley's *Princess Victoire* is the most revelatory, as the woman stands, facing the future, leaving us spectators behind her, in the wake of history."[311] But the space the model faces offers not, as in Landseer's portrait, an open landscape, but a dense wall of leaves that call up images of both the fairytale forest and the fugitive wilderness of the nineteenth-century slave narrative. If the model moves away from us, the space she moves towards could be past or future, historical reality or imagined fantasy. The image, in other words, offers us a view of an African American body framed within multiple, overlapping temporalities and aesthetics—modern, mythical, black, Victorian—that moves into a future blocked from view by the wall of foliage that pulls the figure in. "Princess Victoire" encapsulates the series' play on temporality, femininity, and race as overlapping frames for perception that are subject to reconfiguration and play. By placing modern African American models in nineteenth-century artistic contexts, Wiley invites viewers to consider both the absence of black bodies from the history of art and the way in which slavery, colonialism, and imperialism provide their own context for that history. More importantly, however, Wiley reframes the present as existing in a kind of simultaneity with the past, such that an African American model and a relative of the Queen can come to seem not just uncanny doubles, but as figures who can occupy the same space within the same portrait across time. In "Princess Victoire," what the past and present share more than anything else, however, is their orientation towards a future that both invites the figure in and that remains foreclosed from the audiences' view.

I've turned to Wiley's portraits because they share with Eliot's novel an interest in placing non-white bodies within ostensibly discordant aesthetic and historical frames in order to resist not

[311] Exhibition note in Brooklyn Museum's exhibition, *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic*, organized by Eugenie Tsai, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York. 20 February - 24 May 2015.

only familiar modes of racial perception, but also a rigid separation of past, present, and future. When Mirah steps into slavery's frame, she facilitates a collapse of the British Victorian present of 1876 onto a set of recent and distant pasts: the American Civil War, British West Indian slavery, and the Biblical slavery of the Jews. Similarly, when Wiley's model steps into Princess Victoire's frame, she collapses our present moment onto a Victorian past that looks forward to an unforeseeable future.

Though that future extends outward from our present moment, it also maintains a connection to the Victorians' nineteenth-century future—a future that, in 1839, looked ahead to the post-emancipation decades Eliot's novel would later look back upon. Placing these works alongside one another thus provides an opportunity to imagine a Victorian history of race and slavery through what Nyongó calls "[t]he parallax view," which allows for "a break with the organic and continuist motifs of embodied memory" in favor of a form of "historical contact" that might work towards the "unrealization" of identity as much as its fixture in time and space.[312] Just as Eliot and Wiley unravel the linear relationship between the past and the future, reading these works as companion pieces provides opportunities to complicate our own historicist take on Victorian fiction and its relationship to our present moment. To read Eliot's novel as part of this aesthetic world requires us to read the novel's performances themselves as in some sense suspended in time, calling forward transhistorically not to the novel's separatist conclusion, directed towards the successful ethnic reproduction of Jewish and British life distinct from one another, or to the long history of segregation, imperialism, and violence that followed the novel's version of Victorian history, but instead to a complicated racial future that, like Wiley's portraits, looks different from the nineteenth-century racial past but that also emerges directly from it, and so keeps that past within view.

[312] Nyongó, *The Amalgamation Waltz*, 136.

Kehinde Wiley, "Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 2012," *An Economy of Grace*.

Source: "An Economy of Grace," *Kehinde Wiley Studio*, http://kehindewiley.com/works/an-economy-of-grace/.

By portraying Mirah as a character who traverses temporal and cultural frames while remaining attached to the realities of nineteenth-century history, Eliot's novel, I want to argue, in some sense invites this reading. But, as the portraits of M'Hali I've discussed above attest to, it is precisely because of the novel's very attachment to the real history of nineteenth-century British colonialism and its twentieth-century afterlives that this way of reading remains an illusion sustained by the novel's aesthetics rather than at home within its realist and romantic frames.

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